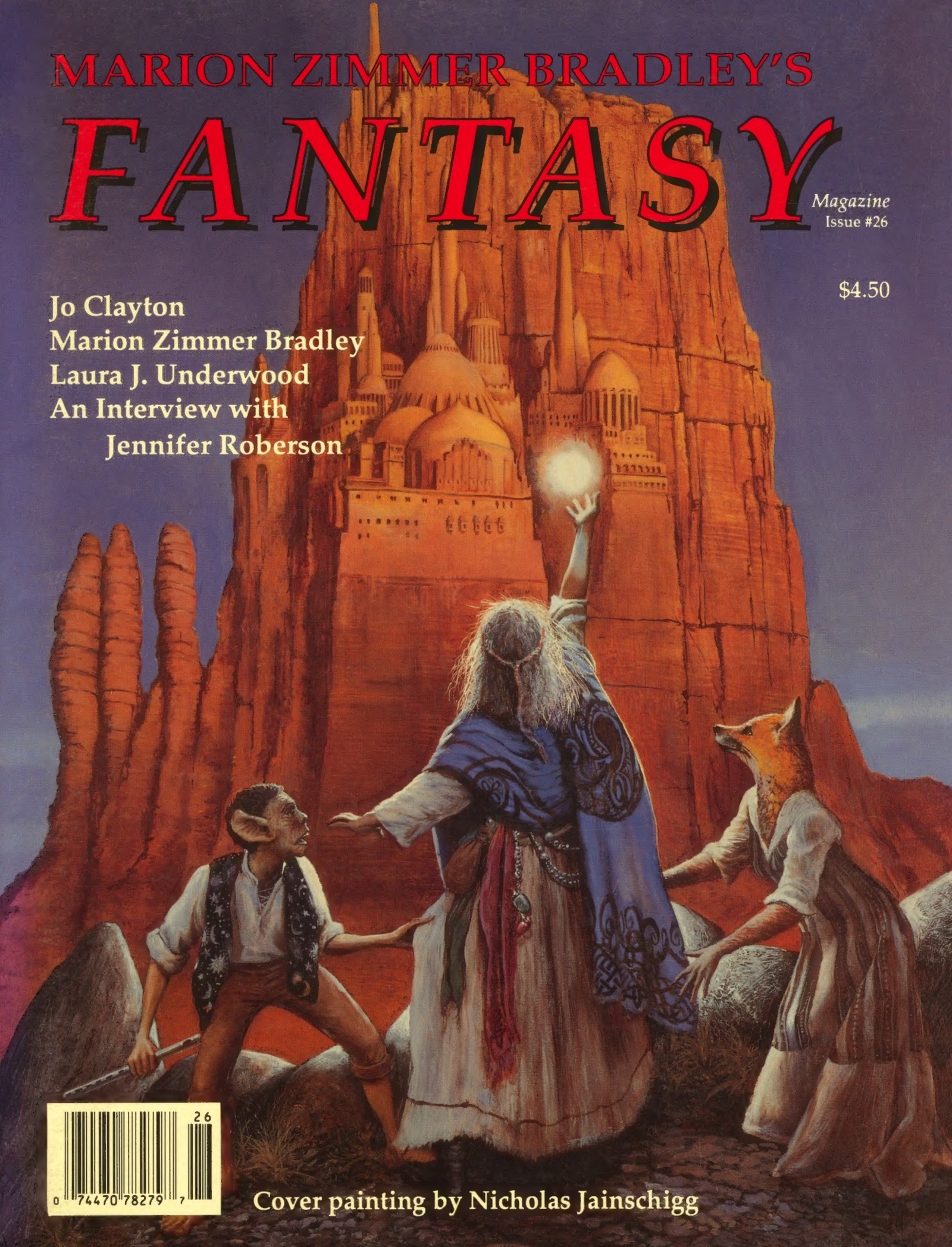
MARION ZIMMER BRADLEY'S FANTASY

Magazine
Issue #26

$4.50

Jo Clayton
Marion Zimmer Bradley
Laura J. Underwood
An Interview with
Jennifer Roberson



0 74470 78279 7 26

Cover painting by Nicholas Jainschigg

Skandranon Rashkae is perhaps the finest specimen of the gryphon race, with gleaming ebony feathers, majestic wingspan, keen magesight, and sharp intelligence. He is everything the human sorcerer Urtho intended to achieve when he created these magical beings to be the defenders of his realm—a verdant plain which has long been coveted by the evil mage Ma'ar.

Now as Ma'ar is once again preparing to advance on Urtho's Keep, this time with a huge force spearheaded by magical constructs of his own, Skandranon is sent to spy across enemy lines.

But as the days pass, with no sign of Skandranon, all in Urtho's camp worry that doom is upon them and that this prince of gryphons will never return...

• Featuring beautiful Jody Lee cover art.

THE BLACK GRYPHON
Mercedes Lackey
& Larry Dixon

DAW FANTASY/first paperback edition:
0-88677-643-0/$5.99 ($6.99 in Canada)

also available in hardcover:
0-88677-577-9/$22.00 ($27.99 in Canada)

DAW Books, Inc.

Publishers of Science Fiction, Fantasy, and Horror Since 1971

Distributed by
PENGUIN USA—MASS MARKET

For our complete Catalog listing hundreds of DAW titles in print, please write:

Elsie B. Wollheim
DAW Books, Inc.
375 Hudson Street
New York, NY 10014

DAW FANTASY

EDITOR
Marion Zimmer Bradley

PUBLISHER
Rachel E. Holmen

DESIGN
Art Weller

CLERICAL ASSISTANCE
Heather Rose Jones
Stephanie Shaver

PROOFREADING
Gil Lamont
Debbie Notkin

Issue #26 – Winter 1995 – Vol. 7 No. 2

MARION ZIMMER BRADLEY'S
FANTASY Magazine
ISSN 0897-9286
Published by the Marion Zimmer Bradley Living Trust
P.O. Box 249
Berkeley, California 94701
(510) 644-9222

SUBMISSIONS:
Marion Zimmer Bradley's *FANTASY Magazine* welcomes free-lance submissions from people who have read our guidelines. All submissions must be accompanied by a self-addressed envelope with adequate return postage. *FANTASY Magazine*, a quarterly, publishes original all new short fiction with fantasy elements in the range of 500 to 6,000 words. The most suitable length and the one most often purchased is between 2,500 and 5,000 words. While every precaution will be taken, we cannot assume liability for unsolicited manuscripts. A duplicate should be retained. Sample copies of the magazine are available for writers and artists at a special rate of $4.00 including postage and handling. Requests for WRITERS' GUIDELINES should include a self-addressed stamped envelope.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR:
All written comments, questions, and suggestions regarding any aspect of the magazine are read by our editor and are assumed to be intended for publication. We reserve the right to edit all submissions. Letters must include sender's name and address.

SUBSCRIPTIONS and BACK ISSUES:
Individual subscriptions are $16.00 for 4 issues in the U.S., $24.00 in Canada, $38.00 foreign subscriptions. All subscriptions, including Canadian, are payable directly in U.S. funds only. Individual copies of the current issue are $5.00 plus shipping. Shipping charges are $1.00 per copy in U.S., $2.00 in Canada, foreign $6.50. Back issues (#4, 6, 12 sold out) $4.95 each plus $2.50 per order shipping in U.S.

ADVERTISING:
Rates available on request.

BOOKSELLERS and SCHOOLS:
Discounts available. For information, call (510) 644-9222 or write to us.
Contents copyright © 1994 by Marion Zimmer Bradley Living Trust
Third class postage paid at Berkeley, CA.

POSTMASTER:
Send address changes to:
Marion Zimmer Bradley
P.O. Box 249
Berkeley, CA 94701

MARION ZIMMER BRADLEY'S
FANTASY
Magazine

EDITORIAL

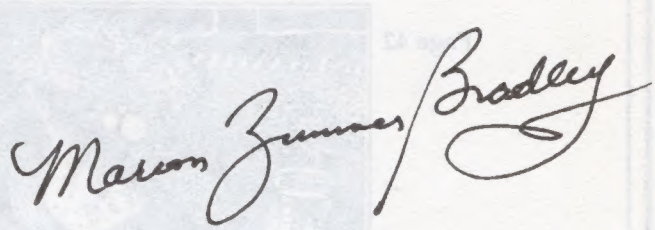
The post office, in its almighty wisdom, has decided to raise the price of a first-class stamp to thirty-one cents. I could use that as a takeoff point for a slapstick editorial about "I'm getting old — I can still remember the three-cent stamp." Actually, I feel a bit bruised. Why does the Government seem to be allied against the written word?

My cousin, Ann Sharp, has a button which says, "Remember — people who read only the National Enquirer make up a significant fraction of the select minority who *can* read." That's a little terrifying.

Originally our Post Office felt proud to give an infinitesimal subsidy to the Forces of Literacy. But now there is a television in almost every home, reading has gone out of style, and it just got more expensive to put printed matter into people's hands. It's all in the name of lower taxes, of course. If you look at what the private companies charge to deliver letters, you realize how much we must be subsidizing the Postal Service. But that's what it was meant to be: a service. And there was a time when people wrote letters and we thought it was a reasonable idea to subsidize their delivery. But now I wonder if it's all in support of some Government agenda: don't let people read — they might begin to think for themselves!

I probably gripe about taxes no less than any American, but when push comes to shove I'm willing to support those things that I consider important. I'd rather pay taxes than be the equivalent of a shun-piker, who crossed the fields rather than pay the tolls on the turnpike, after using the roads that the toll supported.

Whenever people talk about freedom, I suspect them of just wanting to avoid taxes. People have been doing it for a long time. I may be one of the few people who has actually read the much-maligned historicals of Bulwer-Lytton. When I was a kid in those long-past days when I had not yet discovered pulps and science fiction, I read **RIENZI**, one of the most accessible of his historicals. What I remember from that book is mostly that Rienzi — the great liberator — fell when he "dared to tax the free people of Rome", the same people who had cheered him the loudest during the Revolution. Once again I spot an attitude of "Forget liberty, we want lower taxes."

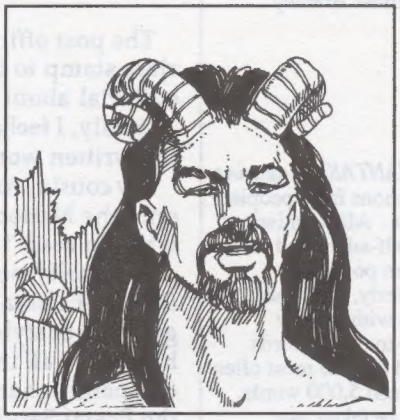


MARION ZIMMER BRADLEY'S

FANTASY Magazine

Issue 26 Winter 1995

Page 52



Page 10

Cover Story

Dinner Music 4

by Jo Clayton; art by Nicholas Jainschigg

A suspicious welcome warns of trouble.

The Satyr's Song 10

by Laura J. Underwood; art by James Balkovek

Whose love will conquer a lady?

The Mage Who Dreamed of Gryphons 17

by Cynthia McQuillin; art by Julia Lacquement

What it might be like to achieve your heart's desire

Brimblestone, Great and Terrible 22

by Michael Mardis; art by Steve Campbell

Not all dragons are monsters.

Page 42

Page 60

Kaleidoscope 24
by Kim Fryer; art by Michael Kucharski
A poignant tale of a mother's love

Learning Experience 31
by Phillip Wayne
Too many wizards spoil the incantation.

Cream, Cake, and Colored Light 32
by Carol E. Leever; art by Gail Butler
Sometimes your best intentions don't work out — or do they?

Needles and Threads 38
by Vicki Martin; art by Dameon Willich
Falseness will cause you trouble; true dedication may be rewarded.

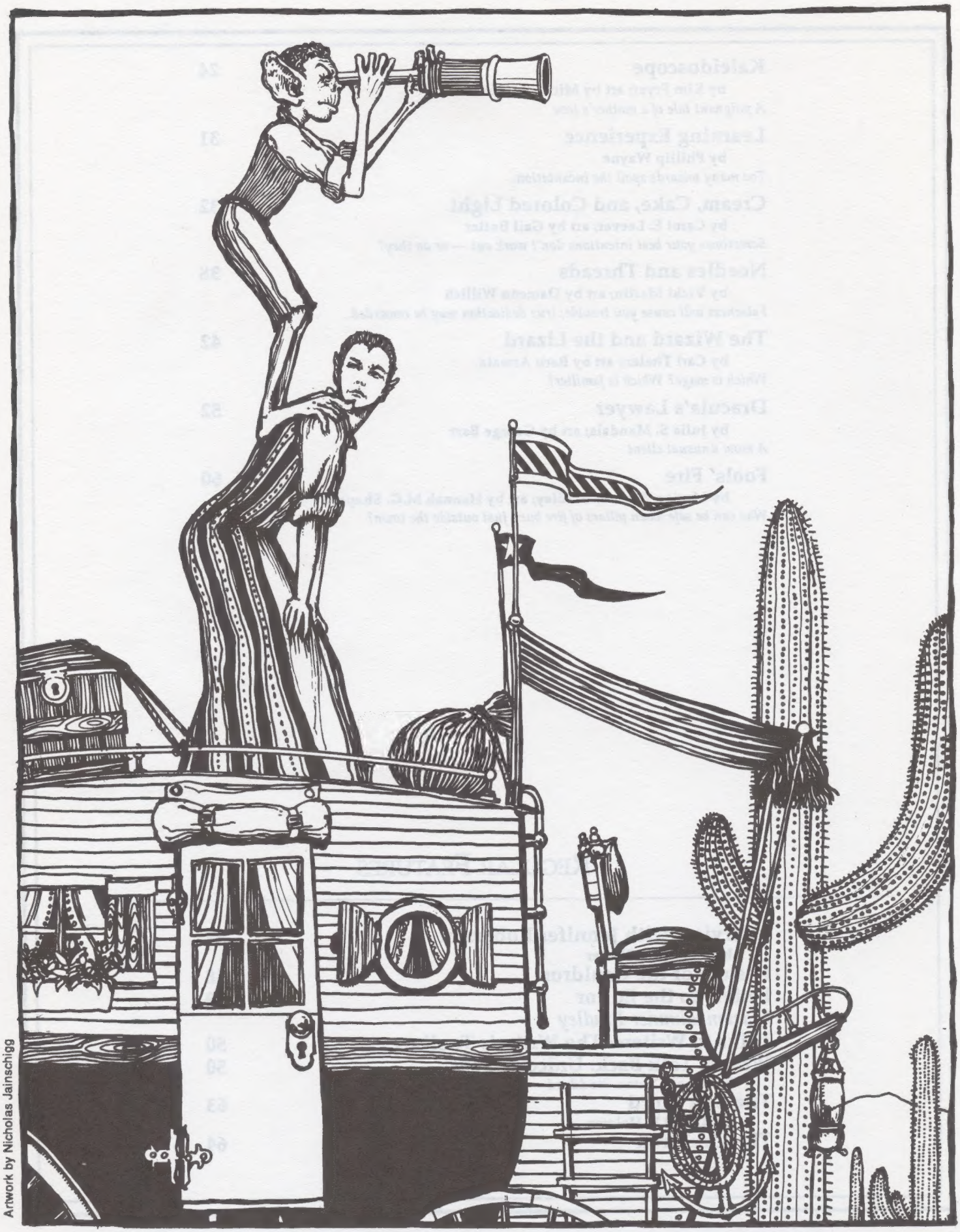
The Wizard and the Lizard 42
by Carl Thelen; art by Barb Armata
Which is mage? Which is familiar?

Dracula's Lawyer 52
by Julia S. Mandala; art by George Barr
A most unusual client

Fools' Fire 60
by Marion Zimmer Bradley; art by Hannah M.G. Shapero
Who can be safe when pillars of fire burn just outside the town?

Regular Features

Interview with Jennifer Roberson 44
by Stephanie Shaver
Results of the Cauldron 48
Letters to the Editor 49
Marion Zimmer Bradley
Talks to Writers: The Writer's Toolbox 50
Writers Talk Back: Unicorn Days 50
by James Coston Stoddard
The Last Word 63
by Rachel E. Holmen
The Cauldron 64



Artwork by Nicholas Jainschigg

Dinner Music

by Jo Clayton

Yohn pulled herself onto the roof of the van, stood with her feet spread while Piri scrambled onto her shoulders and balanced there, his long toes digging painfully into her as he clapped the spyglass to his eye.

"What can you see?" Arakney's voice had a touch of impatience. *The heat*, Yohn thought and blinked away sweat dripping down to sting her eyes.

Piri sucked his teeth as he scanned the horizon. "Two buttes, half a hundred stone pipes, and a lot of sand." With a soft grunt he pushed off from Yohn's shoulders and landed with a thump on the van's roof.

"F'lich! Well, we've still got most of the afternoon left." Arakney shaded her eyes with her hand, squinted at the sky. "A cloud would be welcome."

As Yohn swung down onto the seat, she heard a questioning note from Piri's flute.

Arakney clucked to Dapple, started him moving again across the rubble and hardpan, picking his way between clumps of dead brush crusted with salt crystals. "No, Pir," she said, "we'll save that till we really need it. If we do."

Yohn's nose twitched as they rattled along, her red brown eyes narrowed to slits against the dust Dapple's hooves were kicking up. "Why not call rain?"

"Would your uncle go marching into a sool town, turn bear in the middle of the market, and howl the place into fits?"

Yohn giggled, bounced the heels of her boots against the closure under the seat. "Isn't a sool town out there. Or any kind." She swung her hand in a wide arc. "'Twere, there'd be water for askin'."

"Strange ground, Yohn. I'd rather not stir up what I don't know about."

"Cha la." Yohn fidgeted for several more minutes, then she said, "You think them back there, they were lyin' to us?"

Arakney snorted. "No. Didn't say enough to tell any lies."

"Cha la." Yohn watched Dapple's head bobbing, his tail switching. "Why don't I go running ahead, K'ney? I can go faster nor this. Lots."

Arakney pursed her lips. "Burn your paws."

"No such thing."

"Want me to pull up?"

Before the question was finished, Yohn was on the ground, her thick pads dancing across the pale earth, the desiccated vegetation rustling about her red-brown fur.

Two hours later she came trotting back; she circled behind a clump of tall grass and by the time she was 'round it, she was smoothing her shirt down. When Arakney stopped the van, she climbed the wheel and settled herself on the seat.

"Ch'k ch'k, Dapple, move along. So, Yohn. What did you find?"

"A road. Out behind that butte there, the second one. I've never seen such a road, straight as a knife cut, and flaaaat." She planed her hand, sent it slicing through the air. "There was a man working on the road. He was digging out pieces of stone like this." She shaped the air between her hands, sketching out a cube eight inches on a side. "I s'pose 'cause they were cracked. And he had a pile of new bits waiting for the holes to go in." She wrinkled her nose. "Sool man. Smell bad."

"Piri and I are sool, not were. Do we smell bad?" Yohn closed her eyes to slits, peeped at Arakney, then went into fits of silent laughter.

The sun was low in the west when the van came 'round the butte and up onto the road. Dapple snorted, lifted his feet higher as his shoes rang on the stone. Piri stuck his head out through the curtains, waved his long skinny hand at the road. "That's a lot of work for something going from nowhere to nowhere."

"So tell me what's buzzing in your head, Pirrikin."

"Trapdoor spiders."

"Then we'll have to trip the trap, won't we?"

Yohn twisted around to look from the Osuni to the Story Spinner. "Why?"

"Never you mind, Yohn. Old business."

The roadworker didn't look up as the van drew level with him. He was small and dark, with straight black hair

which he wore cut straight at shoulder level, a red scarf tied about his head to keep it from falling in his eyes. Arakney leaned forward. "What lies ahead, sik'is?"

He kept his eyes on the cracked stone he was removing from the roadway, but the tendons stood out on his neck and his hands started shaking. "The village Da'akee, tl'oo. Ye'll be welcome." His voice was an urgent whisper that barely reached Yohn's ears.

The sun was squashed on the horizon behind them when they came even with a mass of weathered stone rising half a mile into the air, its rugged arms curled 'round fields of a lushness amazing in this arid land, melons on the ground, beans and grapes on wire strung between vigorously growing trees heavy with plums and pears and peaches, the smell of ripe fruit thick on the damp air. Black-haired children ran along plank walkways beside deep narrow canals, opening and closing sluice gates, giving the water to each of the plots in turn. Unlike the roadworker, they stared at the van with bold and fearless eyes.

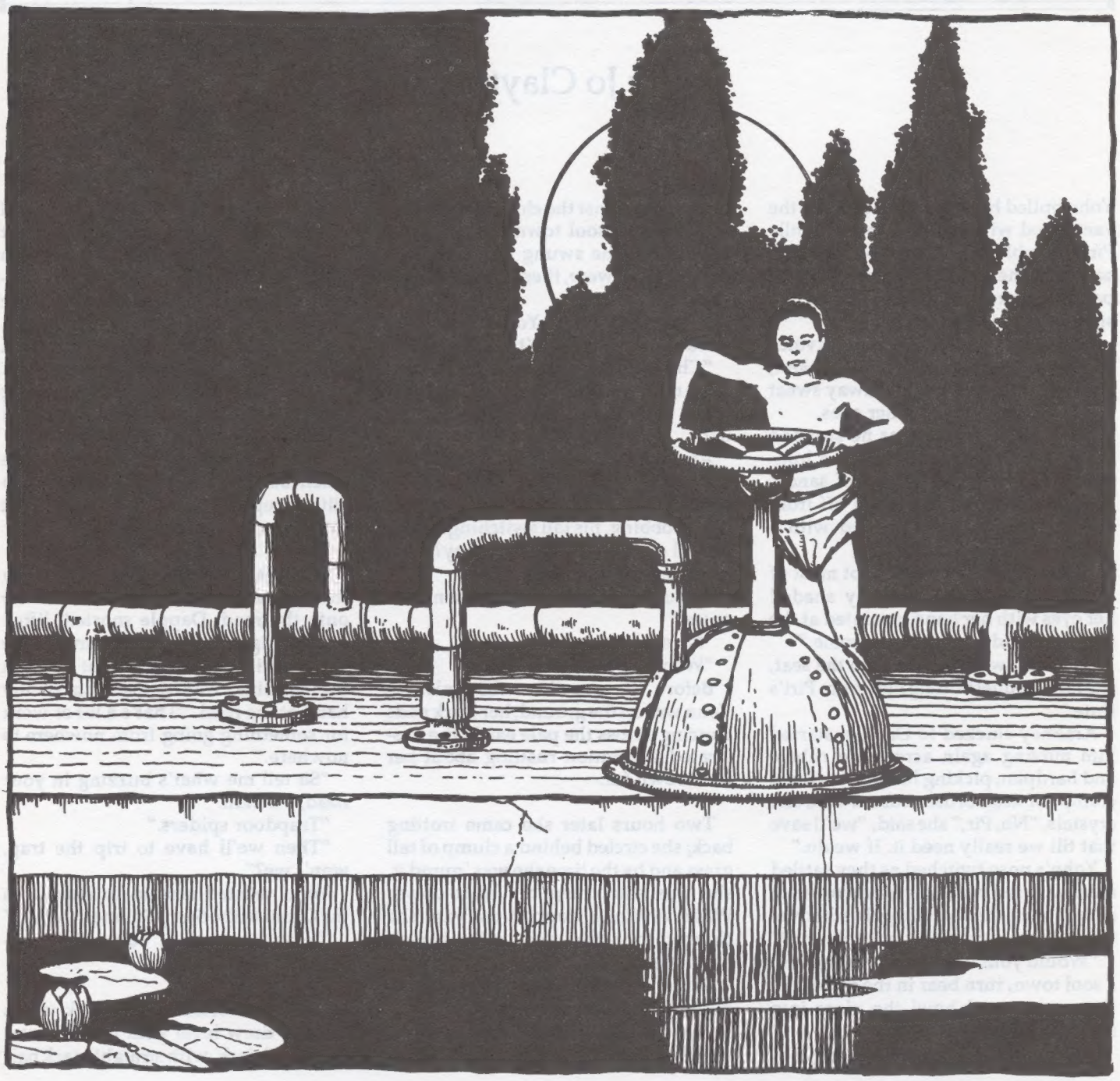
Yohn's ears flattened against her head, her nose twitched. "Like ol' buaj, aren't they? Sticking nose out of river, lookin' over laundry women for his next meal. That what you meant by that spider thing?"

"Pretty much, Yohn." She flicked a finger at the girl's arm, twisted her head around. "Piri?"

"Excitement, expectation, satisfaction. No fear. Masters of what they see. Odd mix from children."

As the van rolled on, the road began to curve, turning 'round the end of the butte's eastern arm.

The village Da'akee was halfway up the side of the butte, built in a broad



Artwork by Nicholas Jainschigg

cave like a toothless giant's grin. There was a long stone stable at the cliff's base, a corral with a few oxen nosing at food in the troughs or drinking from a manger, a pen tacked onto the side with half a dozen pigs crowding 'round a tub of slops.

The road swept past the corral, vanishing around the butte, but there were three young girls standing by a turnoff, smiling, clapping their hands, beckoning to Arakney, doing everything they could to mime a fervent welcome.

Shssh shssh. The room quieted as Arakney shook the story gourds and chanted the ritual opening.

"Long ago when beasts could speak and strange things walked the earth..."

Piri's flute was a gentle flow beneath the words, supporting them. Yohn touched the skin of a small drum, tink-a-tink as she'd been taught, slightly before the beats in Arakney's words; beneath the shag of her thick, coarse hair, her pointed ears shifted, catching the breath-sounds of the listeners. She sat with Arakney and Piri on a raised platform built from wood squares about the size of her palm and polished to a loving gloss.

"Begay of the old soul," Arakney chanted,

Begay of the old soul lived beside the sea, with an old wife, a young son and soolly daughters three... Yohn tinked her nails on the drumskin and watched the Da'akeens who were packed tight in that long room watching back with fervent interest.

When Begay was caught in the bear's pit and carried off to be fattened for winter food, there was tension, a long, common inhalation, then an explosion of nervous laughter when the Badger's child dug him free. When Begay went to market with a mound of dried seabass and met the Whittler and nearly lost a year's work, but escaped through the colossal impenetrability of his bumbling naïveté, there was laughter and no tension at all. When Begay was invited to a grand feast and found nothing but empty plates and hungry eyes watching him, the tension was back, crackling at the refrain, "Dance, Begay, dance, sweep the sorrows away."

Arakney played the refrain again and the Da'akeens started stamping their feet, drowning the flute and the Spinner's voice with the noise.

Yohn glanced at Arakney, wondering when the spider would strike and why she...

The dais split beneath them, the two leaves of the trap dropping smoothly, swiftly. Yohn flung herself to one side, but a boy with a pole whacked her back and sent her tumbling into the dark. She hit the greased slide an instant before Piri and just after Arakney, went swooping through a descending spiral in a blackness more complete than any she could remember even on the stormiest night. Down and down, around and around...she was fizzing with anger and a little afraid, just enough to make this almost fun...down and around until she shot out of the hole and onto something like an elastic membrane.

She heard a grunt as she bounced into Arakney, grunted herself as Piri landed on her, a bundle of sinew and hair, active as an angry cat; she yelped when his bony elbow caught her in the ribs as he rolled off her.

"You all right, Yohn?" The Osuni's tenor had an eerie, not-quite-echoing afternote.

Yohn rubbed at her bruises. "How many elbows you got, Pirrit? Saaa." She blinked as her own voice acquired those odd aftertones. "K'ney?"

"The belly of the beast," Arakney said. Her voice came from some distance off. "Listen."

Yohn got to her feet and staggered a few steps; under her feet the uneven floor felt like skin, warm and resilient. Grimacing with distaste, she flexed her ears.

There were other people in this place. She could smell dung and the acrid bite of urine; she could hear breathing, moans, a series of thumps as if something struggled, then subsided. Over all this was a deep slow ta-toomp, the two-note beat of a great heart. "What is it?"

"I don't know." There was a soft shhhsh shhhsh from the Spinner gourds, a murmured chant in words Yohn couldn't understand, twisty words that made an itch in her head. She wiggled her ears, then sighed with relief as a sphere of blue light formed above the Story Spinner's head and lit up the hollow so she could see again.

The stone walls were covered with skin that looked dark red in the light from the willawisp; long red tendrils like fleshy whiskers dripped from the walls. The breathing came from people lying about on the bubble floor — Da'akeens and a few animals, an ox, some antelope, a few pigs, the village folk free, the animals with their feet tied together. Half a dozen of the Da'akeens huddled together beside a narrow stream that angled across the bubble, faces gaunt, eyes dull, streaks of gray in their hair.

Yohn blinked again, her ears flattened against her head. She moved closer to Arakney. "Grandfolks?"

"Hold this and follow me." Yohn's nose twitched as the willawisp floated into her hand; it had a tickly feel, like a ball of feathers. Balancing it on her palm, she trailed after Arakney who headed for the sturdiest of the locals, a square-bodied old woman with wispy gray-streaked hair drawn back so tightly it dragged the corners of her mouth into a humorless upcurve.

"Sik'is, what is this about?" The woman turned away.

There was a breathy chuckle from what looked like a sack of yellowish leather filled with bones. "Don't ye expect Dilkos to talk to the likes of you, tl'oo. She a purist, push her own mam down the trap and jump herself come her turn."

Arakney circled 'round the woman's feet and stopped before the speaker. "And what's your name, sik'is?"

Another painful chuckle that was more breath than sound. "Call me Bones. Down hole, names don't mean so much."

"Traitor." The willawisp shuddered in Yohn's hand from the venom in the word the woman hurled at old Bones. *If a word without esses could hiss,* she thought, *that one would make a viper proud.*

Bones ignored her. " 'Tis the Kuh'kwah'to. Gives us water long as we keep him happy. We feed 'im travelers and what we catch and traps and if 'tain't enough, and mostly it 'tain't, Kuh'kwah'to he get plenty hungry, us Da'akeen shincho, we pull lots for them who has more'n forty summers and the names that come up, down chute they go." He drew a long breath, the air rattling in his throat. For a moment Yohn thought he'd finished, then the whispery voice went on. " 'Spect you and Dilkos would agree; she thinks for'ners pollute the stream and she can't abide gamblin'. She and them like her, they want to make it law, ye hit forty, down you go."

"Mm. Travelers. How many do you get?"

"One or two a month. It's the road. Pulls 'em in. Got half dozen once, bunch

Artwork by Nicholas Jainschigg

a players. Picked the wrong place to play, didn't they?"

"How long has this been happening?"

"Dunno. 'Fore my grandda were born."

"I see. How does it work?"

"Every three four days, Kuh'kwah'to, he floods his belly and washes what's in it someplace, don't know where; don't specially want to, but *want* don't go here. If you swim good and can catch one of they tendrils up there, you don't get swallowed. Been through it three times now, but next time ol' Kuh'k, he'll get me. So weak a tadling could whup my tail." He coughed. "Dumped you at dinnertime, right? Yaadi la, sometime 'fore mornin' ol' Kuh'k, he'll be swallowin' agin."

Arakney snapped her fingers. The willawisp leaped to her cupped hands, nestled between them, and vanished as she pressed her palms together.

In the dark that followed, Arakney and Piri began talking quietly in that weird slippery tongue they used when they didn't want people to know what they were saying.

Yohn settled herself on the floor, making faces as the sickeningly warm skin moved under her, rolling and wrinkling as she shifted around. She pulled her knees up and leaned on them as she thought things over.

This wasn't the first time or the second since she joined them that Arakney and Piri had jumped to deal with some sort of trouble. *Lodestone,* Yohn thought, *that's what they are. They sniff out monsters like a lodestone sniffs iron.* She grinned. *Fun, too. Better by a lot than marrying Borg and settling down to raise kids and forget what fourfoot running feels like.*

The floor twitched. Yohn put out a hand to steady herself, swallowed hastily as she felt the skin respond to her touch. "K'ney..."

"I know. Hush now. I need to think." The throbbing boomed through the chamber. Behind and below it was a faint gurgle of water that grew quickly louder and merged with the heartbeats. Around her Yohn heard screams and curses from the Da'akeens, blats, honks and squeals from the frightened beasts — then, sounds of scrabbling, panting.

Hard bony hands grabbed hold of Yohn, began dragging her down.

She yipped, tried to pull free. The strength of those hands defeated her, terrified her. She shifted, ripped fox

teeth along the stringy arms, smiled a fox smile as she wrenched herself free from the screaming thing. *Cha la, old woman, mess with me and you get what you ask for.*

She sniffed at the air currents swirling around her, located Arakney, and trotted over to her. Shifting back so she could speak, she said, "This what I think?"

"Dinner time, Yohn. And we're the main course." Yohn blinked at the laughter in the older woman's voice, clicked her teeth with indignation. "I don't think so."

"Nay, we're going to disappoint our host. Catch hold of my skirt, don't let go. Whatever happens, don't let go."

A trickle of liquid washed across Yohn's feet. The sturdy cloth of Arakney's skirt was suddenly hot against her palms.

Breathing — quick, soft pants. Smell of Piro's wet fur as he climbed over her and onto Arakney's shoulders, a coolness as the silver flute touched her arm, then slid away.

An enormous belch. Water driving into them. Over them. Catching them up, whirling them 'round and 'round, sweeping them through a sphincter where whippish cilia beat at them until they out of the first stomach into a lower one, smaller one.

The two-note thunder of the heart hammered at Yohn. Water choked her, plucked at her, tried to break her away from Arakney, but she held on with both hands until the three of them were bobbing like chips of wood in the bloodwarm water.

A new sound blended with the thunder. Arakney was singing, her voice grown suddenly immense, the words too big to fit in Yohn's ears.

Piri's flute joined in, harsh animal squeals that tore at Yohn's ears, ugly and angry.

The chant and the flute cries got louder, faster, faster... The beat of the great beast's heart bumped faster, faster...

Until something screamed — not a sound in the ears, but an enormous agony in the mind that went on and on...

Until something went **BLAM**... Then, for a breath, there was silence. A stillness as thick and impenetrable as the darkness.

Things splashed down around her, something bounced off her shoulder with an awful squishy splat! and a strong smell of blood.

"Ay yi! What...?"

"Hold tight, Yohn, this ride could get rough." Arakney began stroking through the water as if she knew where she was going.

A moment later Yohn felt it too. The water was falling and where it went they could go. Maybe.

Something bumped into her, bumped again. She freed one hand, pushed at the thing, bile rising in her throat as she felt the cold slick skin of the drowned man — though the wet diminished her odor-reading, she recognized him. *Old Bones, he was right, but at least he won't be eaten.* She gagged at the thought and at the flutter of his feet scraping against her. She shoved at him, pushing him away from her. "Gahh."

"You all right, Yohn?" Arakney's voice was calm, warm; it touched Yohn's ears like soothing syrup.

"*Things*, K'ney. Ook. Can't we get out of here?"

"Soon. Just hang on, luv." Cold, wet. She hated wet. More things bumping into her, gobbets of flesh from the exploded heart, drowned folk, beasts, in the dark, the horrible dark.

A shimmer of grey ahead, a hole ringed with limp cilia. They burst through and fell into the moon's image floating on the water of a holding pool.

Da'akeens were howling and jigging on the pool's banks, black forms in the night, roaring with rage and fear, hurling spears and rocks at them.

A spear cut through the water inches from Yohn's shoulder, skewering one of the bodies that came through with them. Stones began splashing around her.

Arakney swam to the middle of the pool. "Piri, got enough breath for it?"

Piri coughed, spat, shook out the flute. "Give me your arm. Yohn, take hold of Arakney again and don't let loose."

Even though the thickened air that built 'round her like walls of air muffled the flute's cry, the sound made Yohn shudder.

The Da'akeen on the stone levees screamed and dropped, lay writhing on the ground.

Supporting Piri with one arm, Yohn clinging to her skirt, Arakney paddled toward the edge, then slipped beneath the Osuni and stood with him straddling her shoulders. She climbed the bank, strode through scattered Da'akeen who were curled up, moaning with agony.

A stone shard grazed Yohn's shoulder, more stone fragments fell around them. She looked up. The butte was cracking apart. She stumbled as the ground bumped and shifted under her feet, her hand almost torn from Arakney's skirt, the flute song suddenly louder, like acid on her skin. Whimpering, she caught herself, tightened her grip, and moved closer.

When they turned the corner of the crumbling butte, Arakney stopped. "Yohn, when the flute song cuts off, you go four foot and run for the road, hide near it and wait for us, hm?"

"K'ney..."

"Don't argue. We know how to handle this." Arakney touched a knuckle to Yohn's cheek. "Remember how you met us. On the run and a little bit lost."

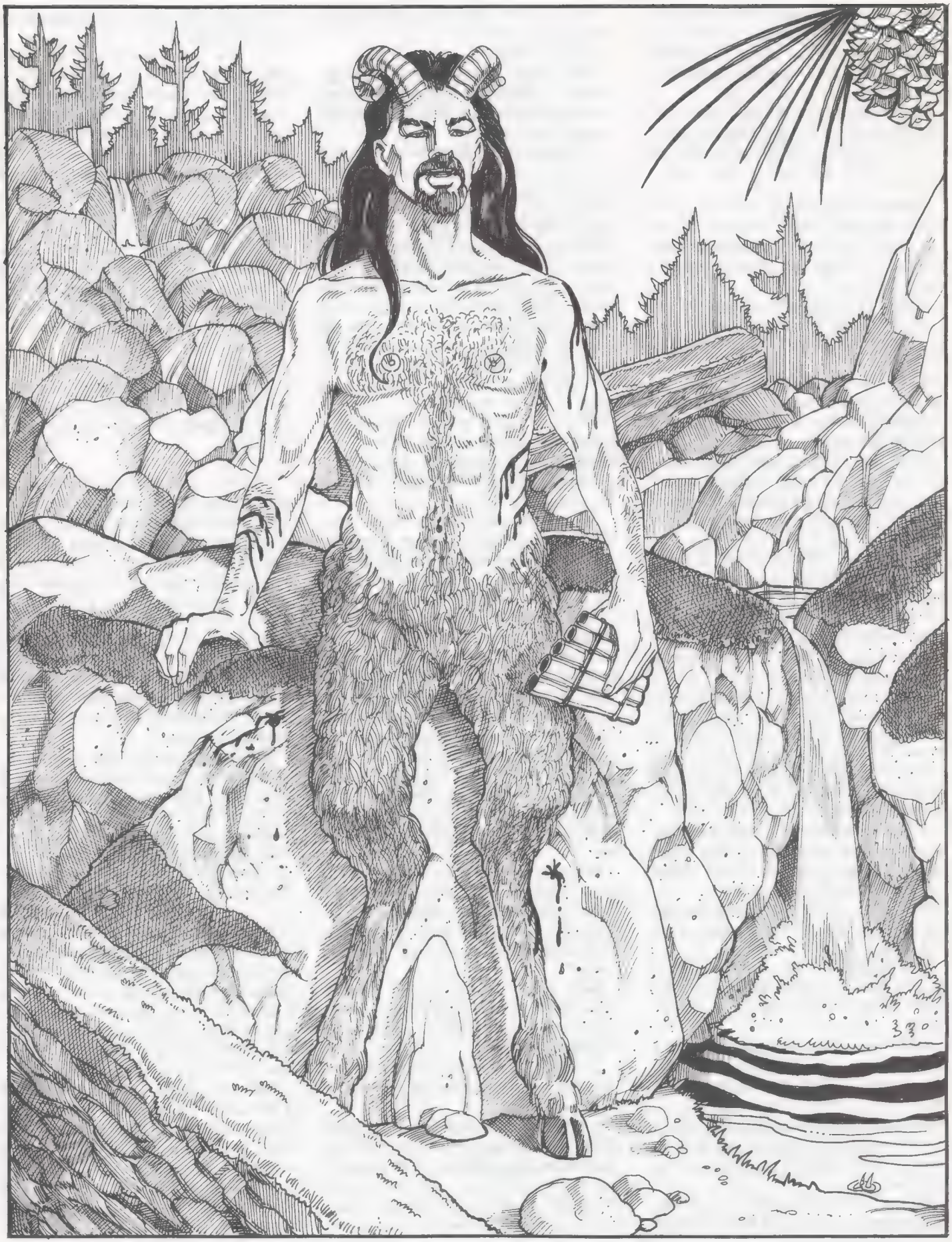
Yohnfox crouched in a thicket of dry brush, eyes on the road, a pale ribbon in the moonlight. A night wind howled along the pavement, rattled the dead leaves, cast a sprinkle of dust against her — and brought the low growl of the collapsing butte to her ears. *It's like the Ogeri*, she thought. *Different too. We killed the monster, but killed the village with it. No more water. No more easy fat life. On the other side, no more grandfolks and strangers fed to that whatever it was. Cha la, if something tries to eat us, it's no shame to bite back.*

She heard the clip-clop of Dapple's feet, the crunch and rattle of the wheels before she made out the blotch in the darkness that was the van coming toward her. Yipping softly, she wriggled from the thicket, trotted to the center of the road, shifted and stood waving as the Dapple came toward her.

❄

Jo Clayton lives in Portland with a calico cat named Tigerlily who is a lovely monitor ornament and a sealpoint siamese named Owl who has a habit of levitating into small high places. When she's not laughing at the cats, she manages to write novels and a few short stories.

Nicholas Jainschigg lives in New York City with his wife Monica and a grey-cheeked parakeet. His covers have been seen on numerous sf magazine and books in recent years. He won the Jack Gaughan Memorial Award for Best Emerging Artist. ("What I'm emerging from is not mentioned," he notes.)



Artwork by James Balkovek

The Satyr's Song

by Laura J. Underwood

The music was what caught Anwyn Baldomyre's attention at first. The soft trill of a flute played such a mournfully beautiful song, that the young harper paused on a rock in the middle of the stream he was crossing just to listen. The sounds seemed to emanate from the depths of the forest on the other bank. The musician ran up and down a minor scale, enhancing it with fluttering notes that raised the hairs on Anwyn's neck. By the Four, that was a sound to beset any minstrel's heart with envy.

"Sounds fey to me," Glynnanis sang to Anwyn's mind, and the harper turned a silvery glance at the unicorn head that rose over his shoulder from the white wooden harp he carried on his back.

"Fey or not, it's wonderful," Anwyn said. He loved the call of good music, no matter who — or what — the creator might be. Picking his way on across the stream, he made it to the other bank; then, cocking his head to locate the source of the music, he ventured carefully into a thick copse of hemlocks. The moss beneath his feet was as soft as any cushion.

The music was growing more wistful as Anwyn made his way through the trees. Here, the shadows were as inky as the darkest night, in spite of the fact that it was midday. He felt his way across roots and branches until it became apparent that the trees ahead were growing thin. At the rim of a clearing, he paused and felt as though he had entered a place that knew nothing of time.

Mist rolled and curled about the clearing, filtering the blades of sunlight that managed to slice between the thick-needled boughs of trees. A bare trickle of a brook slithered over mossy stones and fallen logs, pooling at the base of a platform of rock.

And there upon the granite sat what might have been a man. Except Anwyn could never recall seeing any man, human or Thuathyn like himself, possessed of horns that spiraled gracefully from the forehead, bowed over a set of wooden pipes. Long black hair fell over bare shoulders of muscle and sinew, broken by thin line and wide splashes of crimson...

Blood! Anwyn gasped aloud and the creature ceased to play. Turning, it glared at the harper with eyes of amber, as feral as any beast.

Grunting, the creature tried to lurch to its feet, only to fall back to the surface of the rock. Anwyn got a glimpse of what he had thought were hairy trews. No, this being bore the hind quarters of a goat, and now the young harper could see that one leg was matted with blood. Grimacing, the creature lowered itself to its elbows and bowed its head.

"Go on, Thuathyn," the creature said, voice ragged with pain. "Kill me and be done."

Those words took Anwyn by surprise. He opened his mouth to protest when he heard the magical hum of his harp.

"Satyr," Glynnanis said almost contemptuously. "That figures!"

Anwyn started to tell Glynnanis to hold its tongue, but the magical harp's voice was only audible to some mageborn like Anwyn who were marked by silver or grey eyes. Instead, he shook away his uncertainty and started towards the creature at a cautious pace. The strong scent of a goat mixed with the heavy musk of a man assailed Anwyn's nostrils as he drew closer to the creature.

"I'm sorry," Anwyn said. "I mean you no harm. I can help if you'll let me."

Grimly, the bowed head rose. "Why should you?"

Anwyn shrugged. That was a question he sometimes had difficulty understanding for himself. "Because I want to," he said and slipped Glynnanis's sack off one shoulder as he quickened his pace. Mounting the rock, he knelt beside the satyr, taking stock

of the multitude of wounds on the body and the leg. Even rows of torn flesh greeted his gaze, like the slash of claws — or teeth.

"What happened?" Anwyn asked.

"Hounds," the creature said.

Anwyn nodded. He had seen packs of dogs do such damage to livestock and game alike, and his father, who was gamekeeper to the High Lord of Nymbaria, often cursed the owners for their cruelty and neglect. *And I'm not helping this poor creature by sitting and staring at...him?* the harper thought. Yes, with that face, this creature was handsome as any man.

Anwyn sighed and closed his eyes, reaching into his memory for the notes of the Healing Song. Softly, Anwyn hummed the notes and felt the sense of calm and peace entering his soul. He reached out to take the creature's hands in his own. Strong hands they were, yet quite softer than he would have imagined.

Opening his mouth, Anwyn let the song and its power flow, felt the comforting glow of the spell's warmth grow in him as he used his will to send the healing power forth.

The creature gasped. Maintaining his song, Anwyn opened his eyes. A rainbow of colors flowed between him and the satyr, intensifying over the various cuts and melding them closed. Only when the youth felt certain that his spell song had done its work did he let go of the Healing Song. The colors lingered, shimmering, then faded, leaving the satyr breathing hard and looking at himself in pure amazement.

"What magic is this?" the creature said, its own gaze rising to stare at Anwyn, then narrowing as though some secret were found. "Silver eyes — you are a mage!"

Anwyn shook his head. "I'm a harper — a minstrel who knows a few cantrips and a limited number of spell songs." He sighed. "I have never made my sacrifice, you see."

"Sacrifice or not, Thuathyn, you are powerful and I am forever in your debt," the satyr said. One hand reached out in an offering of friendship. "I am called Ciaran."

"And I am Anwyn," the harper said, accepting the hand and smiling. "But you owe me nothing, I can assure you."

"Yet surely, even a mageborn has needs," Ciaran said, his amber eyes taking on a momentary glitter of mischief.

Anwyn felt his cheeks flushing, for he felt some thoughts were best left unspoken. Ciaran was handsome enough, and the upper part of his body reminded the harper a little of another. It was the lower portion that kept Anwyn's tongue. *The man's half goat!* he thought.

"You hesitate," the satyr said. "There is something you would desire of me?"

Not the words I would have chosen, Anwyn mused. "The song you were piping when I arrived," he said. "Would you teach that to me?"

Ciaran reared back, clearly disturbed. "Oh, no, you would not want to learn that song," he insisted. "That is a mourning song."

"But it was so beautiful," Anwyn said. "Please?"

"It is too dear to me," Ciaran said evasively.

"Why?"

"Because — it is the song I wrote to mourn she who was taken from me, she who carries my child."

Anwyn cocked his head as Ciaran turned aside. The amber eyes of the satyr glistened with moisture. "Someone you loved?" Anwyn asked.

Ciaran nodded slowly.

"Humph!" Glynnanis said. "What would a satyr know of love! All they know is lust!"

Anwyn shot the harp a cross look before turning back to the satyr. "Someone who has died?" the harper ventured as gently as possible.

Ciaran looked back, shaking his head. "No," he said. "She was taken from me, by a man with grey eyes."

Anwyn felt his breath catch in his throat as he sought to stay calm. Grey eyes meant only one thing. "Where did this mage take her?"

"To his cottage off by the waterfall. When I tried to reclaim her, he sent his dogs to chase me away, and when I refused to go — he set them on me. It took all my strength to battle them away, and only when I was down and bleeding did he call them off. I crawled here, thinking I would die. Then you came and healed me."

"Where is this cottage?" Anwyn said.

Ciaran's eyes became suspicious slits. "Why?"

"Well, I'm more minstrel than mage, and I do love your mourning song," Anwyn said. "And as I see it, if I am able to free your love from this mage, then perhaps you would be willing to teach me that song?" He let his voice and brows rise in hope.

A slow smile spread across Ciaran's face. "That is a bargain I cannot refuse," the satyr said. "For the return of my beautiful, golden-haired Emer, I will teach you every song I know."

"A bargain indeed," Anwyn agreed as he thrust forth his own hand. Ciaran took it in a strong grasp and smiled.

"This is madness!" Glynnanis scolded, and Anwyn felt certain the harp was pitching its musical voice overly sharp just to be irritating.

"What is mad about helping someone?" Anwyn said. He followed the path Ciaran instructed, a trail that followed the stream and wove its way through tangles of rhododendron, thick hemlocks, and gnarly oaks, depriving the dank loam beneath his feet of all but a little sunlight.

"What is mad...?" Glynnanis made a half-choked sound of surprise. "You have no business challenging a true mage and you know it!"

"Really?" Anwyn said. "Aren't you the one who is always insisting I should be what I am meant to be? A mage? That I should use my powers as they were meant to be used and stop denying myself?"

"You are not doing this to prove yourself as a mage," Glynnanis said. "You're only interested in that lascivious satyr's silly song!"

"I am doing this because I believe in helping those in misfortune who require my aid — when I can give it," Anwyn said. He paused as the roar of a waterfall began to fill his ears. "If Ciaran wishes to teach me his songs in exchange..."

"Satyrs are notorious liars," Glynnanis said.

"You're just saying that because satyrs are better at laying claim to virgins than unicorns," Anwyn said with a chuckle.

"Humph!!!" A single note, as cold as winter pierced Anwyn's mind, but it was worth it because the harp fell silent and still. Good thing, too, for the path Anwyn followed had widened out into a good-sized clearing, and there the harper found himself stopping to stare in wonder at the bounty of carvings scattered about the yard before a rather ornate cottage. Whoever the craftsman was, the skill on display had little equal. Animals in intricate detail, right down to the fur. Humans caught in the various poses of life. Were it not for the visibility of polished grain and

color, Anwyn would be willing to swear they were real.

"These are beautiful," Anwyn said and moved on into the yard. He passed under a carved trellis wound with wooden ivy and roses as delicate as their live counterparts. His roving glance caught figures of mythical beings as well as real — including a statue of a satyr that looked surprisingly like Ciaran. As Anwyn stepped among them, he let his gaze fall over the front of the cottage that was nestled against the rising hill. His eyes caught movement at one of the upper windows, and he swore he saw a woman's sad visage cowled under a cascade of gold before she drew back out of view.

Emer? he wondered. Well, it was now or never if he wanted to earn those songs. Anwyn stepped up to the door and knocked, glancing over at the waterfall that tumbled down from above and turned a little mill wheel.

The barking of dogs assailed his ears, and almost by instinct, Anwyn stepped back. But a voice shouted from behind the wood, "Away with you, mongrels!" before the bolt was slid and the upper half of the door swung inside.

Grey eyes, set in a wrinkled face with a neatly trimmed white beard, fixed on the harper. Anwyn found himself looking back at a man who might have been many times the harper's age. Human to be sure, but he was hardly outfitted like any mage Anwyn had ever met. The old man wore the leather apron of a craftsman, and there were chips of wood and sawdust sprinkled over his clothes.

"What do you want?" he asked in a very direct manner, only to narrow his eyes.

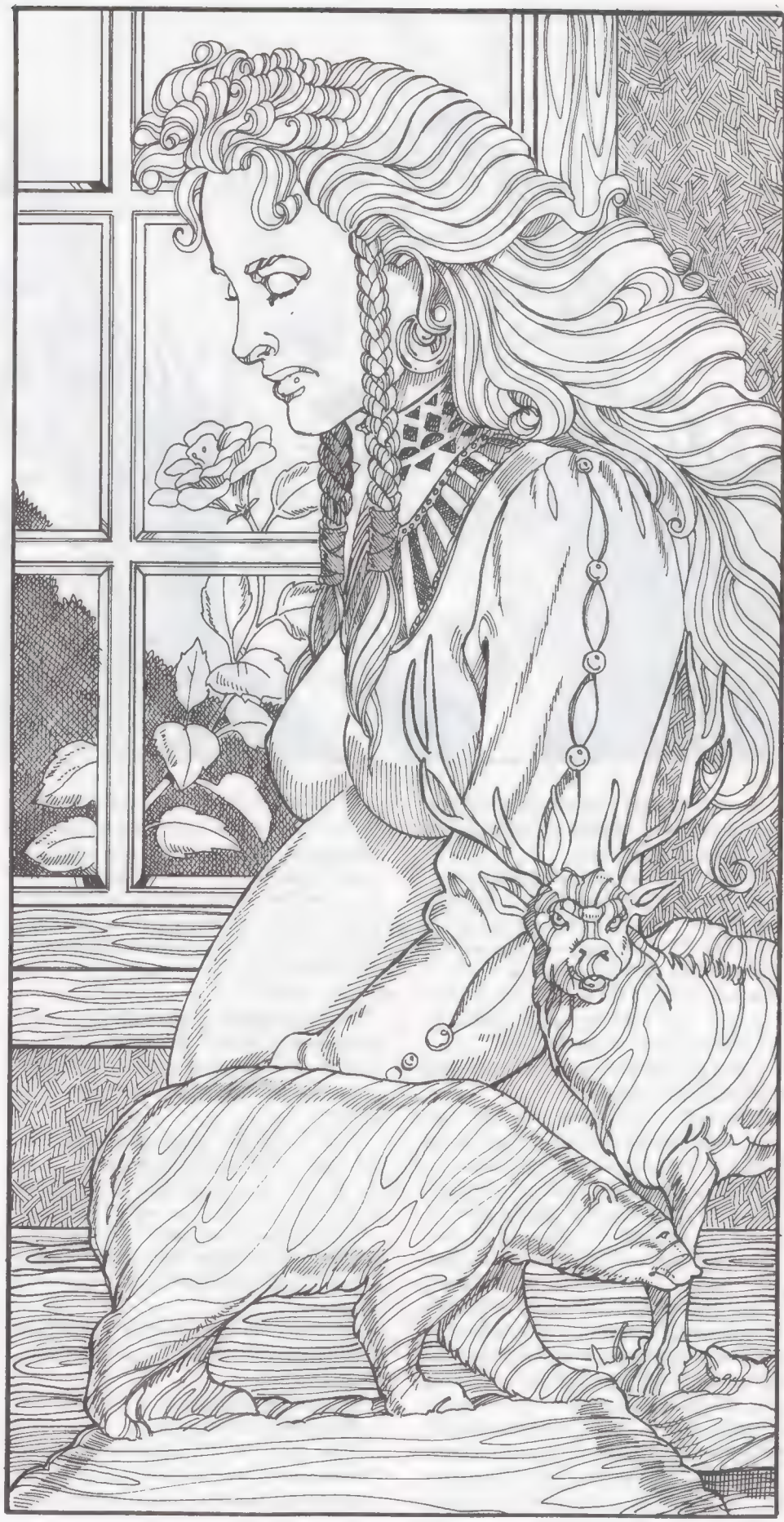
"I'm a traveling harper, looking for a warm fire to sleep by this night," Anwyn said. "For that honor, I would willingly trade labor or song."

"And why would a mageborn need my fire to keep himself warm?" the old man said.

"Mageborn?" Anwyn said, hoping his silver eyes would not betray his innocent stare, and felt just a tinkle of amusement from Glynnanis.

The old man's gaze flashed briefly at the harp, then turned a stern look back at Anwyn that reminded him all too well of the glare his own father wore when scolding his youngest son for some misdemeanor.

"Try another, laddie," the old man said. "I may have lost my youth, but I have never lost my wits."



Artwork by James Balkovek

Artwork by James Balkovek

Anwyn cursed silently as he felt his face flush with embarrassment. "I'm sorry, sir, it's just that..."

"Oh, don't look so flustered, laddie," the old man said, and a much warmer expression added gentle wrinkles to his face. "This is Lamboria, and a mage can't be too careful. In some parts of this land, we are burned for the color of our eyes and nothing more. Come in, lad. Do you have a name?"

"Anwyn Baldomyre," Anwyn said, and smiled in return.

"Darragh's the name," the old man said and opened the lower half of the door. Anwyn took the invitation to heart, passing into a warm, friendly chamber. And immediately found himself investigated by three cold, wet noses. As his eyes adjusted to the dimmer light, the hounds now slowly wagging their tails in a tentative gesture of friendship looked more like wolves.

"Away with you, mongrels!" Darragh said, and the dogs dispersed, rushing for various corners and doors. "Damned dogs. You feed them so they will protect you and all they do is make friends with every stranger who passes by." But he was smiling as he spoke.

"I guess if a man lives alone, he needs such companions," Anwyn ventured, eyeing the carvings that decorated this room. Smaller versions of some of the ones he had seen outside were scattered about, and among them, Anwyn spotted a carving of a girl who faintly resembled the face the harper had seen from outside.

"My daughter," Darragh said and pointed to a chair. "I hardly live alone, you see. She has been my sole companion since her mother died six summers back."

"Oh?" Anwyn said, accepting the invitation. "What is her name?"

"Emer," the old man said as he seated himself in the chair across the way.

Anwyn knew his cheeks were burning.

"I told you satyrs were notorious liars," Glynnanis said with a triumphant sting.

And then he saw the old man's face grow dark with rage. "So, he sent you, did he?"

Anwyn gasped, shaking his head in a futile gesture of denial.

"Oh, you needn't lie to me, laddie. Those silver eyes betray you too well —and I just heard what your harp said. I told you, I might have lost my youth, but not my wits."

Anwyn closed his eyes briefly. *Idiot!* he thought. Of course, he should have remembered that some who were mageborn could hear Glynnanis's song. When he opened his eyes, those grey orbs were fixing him with that stern glower again, and Darragh was leaning forward in his chair like a parent about to scold.

"So, you have fallen for his lies too, have you, young mage?" Darragh said. "Let me tell you my tale before you judge me ill."

"Sir, I had not..."

"Emer is my daughter," Darragh said so firmly that Anwyn was snapped into silence. He pulled Glynnanis around before him like a shield. "She is all I have left in this world, aside from my creations. You see, where I was born, my eyes were considered a curse, and I would have been put to death the day I was birthed, but my father was a wise carpenter with a more open mind than most, and thought ill of the local superstitions. He took his family away from the village, settling here in the middle

of nowhere, working the wood and traveling many days just to sell his wares and keep us alive. In his absences, I took up the chisel and mallet and learned to carve.

"The wood became my life, and eventually, when my father died, I took his place as carpenter, but I was more. I could create the beauties you have been admiring since you arrived in my yard. I too took my wares to the villages, always being cautious to keep my eyes lowered that no man might get too close a glance and know me for my birthright. I met my wife that way. She thought me shy at first, and was not put off to see the color of my eyes or know their meaning. She even came here and bore me a daughter. My lovely little Emer. And when my wife died, Emer was my comfort, for she looks so much like her mother. At least, she was my comfort until that cursed creature came, wooing her with its songs and its promises. It stole my Emer from me, and only by perseverance have I managed to reclaim her. Only now..."

Darragh paused, his grey eyes filling with pain, and Anwyn could feel the keen of agony in his own mage soul. "Now?" the young harper said with an uneasy sigh.

Darragh looked at his hands, flexing them thoughtfully. "Now, my daughter sits in her room and pines for the beast-man who has made her heavy with child. And I do not know what to do. She is all I have, and I would not lose her to him, and yet...I fear I shall. And there is nothing I can do, for she will not eat, will not speak to me. I even carved his likeness for her, hoping it would make her happy, but it only seems to have increased her pain. Every day, she grows thinner and weaker. I worry that she will not have the strength to bear her child and live — that the child itself will be stillborn."

His voice quivered as he spoke, and the grey eyes seemed to grow damp. "That creature had the gall to come here last night and try to steal her again. In my fury for the trouble it had caused, I set the dogs on it, only to see the pain in my daughter's eyes increase tenfold. I do not know what to do. I do not know how to break its spell on her."

"But, you are a mage," Anwyn said. "Surely..."

"Are you truly that innocent?" Darragh said, his bushy brows rising. "I have not made the sacrifice to release my power, boy. All my life, I cursed what I was born to be, cursed the agony of knowing the power I could wield, the power I deny myself. Giving life to figures of wood has been the only way I can relieve that pain."

Anwyn closed his eyes again. *I know how he feels,* the harper thought. How often had he denied his own power and found his music was the only solace for its need. And here was a man who had lived a long, full life in spite of that sweet pain. Anwyn's fingers itched to rake the strings of his harp in a mournful song of his own. Instead, he drew himself upright and opened his eyes to stare at Darragh's grim visage.

"Perhaps, there is something I can do to help," Anwyn said. "I too have denied the power I carry and sought to escape it, but from a friend who is a powerful mage, I have learned some rudimentary spells through my songs. I have a spellsong that might ease your daughter's heartache and open her eyes again."

"You would do this for us?" Darragh said.

Anwyn nodded.

"What about your promise to Ciaran?" Glynnanis said. "What about the songs he was going to teach you?"

"I can make my own songs," Anwyn said to the harp.

"It's about time you remembered that," the harp said.

Anwyn looked at Darragh. "There will still be the matter of Ciaran. I will do nothing to harm him, and I don't think you should either. After all, the child Emer carries is his, too."

Darragh nodded. "Perhaps I am being a fool. But after what I did, how do I know the beast won't steal my daughter and the child and carry them off where they can never be found? I love her, and I want her to be happy, but it would kill me to be denied her company."

Anwyn nodded. "Ciaran may yet be convinced to strike a bargain with you on that matter. He still owes me a favor for healing him."

"I only hope he will listen," Darragh said. "If he would but promise not to take her away, he would be welcome to live here."

Anwyn nodded. "Let us see to Emer first," he said.

"This way," Darragh said, rising from his chair, and slipping Glynnanis from its sercloth sack, Anwyn rose and followed the old man up the stairs.

Dew dripped from the ferns where the early morning sun was unable to reach the ground, flinging droplets on Anwyn's trews and boots as he passed through the woods. He found the clearing easily enough, but Ciaran was not there, so Anwyn seated himself on the rock and drew Glynnanis from its sack, and there in the chill of the shade, Anwyn began to play a song.

"I hope this works," Glynnanis said. "Satyrs are notoriously bad-natured when they think they are being cheated. He might even gore you."

"I'm not cheating anyone," Anwyn said. "Emer is willing to have him come stay at the cottage, as is her father. We have only to convince Ciaran that this is for the better." The harper closed his eyes, listening to the gentle notes he produced under his skillful fingers. In his thoughts, he recalled the pain and loneliness that had masked Emer's face before he sang the Song of Peace. How she had stirred from her trancelike glamor to blink and cry in her father's arms. Anwyn had left them alone to speak, but soon he was called back. Emer was pleased to think Ciaran could come live at the cottage, for she truly loved him.

Now, we shall know if he truly loves her, Anwyn thought. He only hoped Ciaran would not know that he was being coerced by his own love, for Emer had agreed to allow the harper to test the satyr's feelings — for the sake of her father.

"He comes," Glynnanis said. A rustling sounded from the edge of the copses. Anwyn continued his sweet song, never letting his eyes rise. There was no denying the thump of cloven hooves nor the strong goatlike odor that swirled on the morning fresh air.

Love must truly be blind, the harper mused. *Or at least, have a poor sense of smell.*

"Well?" Ciaran said. "Where is Emer?"

"Emer is with her father," Anwyn said, looking up at the satyr.

The amber eyes darkened with outrage. "What! You did not bring her to me!"

"Do you really love her?" Anwyn asked, stilling the strings of the harp.

"Of course I love her!" the creature snarled. "That is a foolish question to ask!"

"But necessary," Anwyn said. "For much depends on the answer."

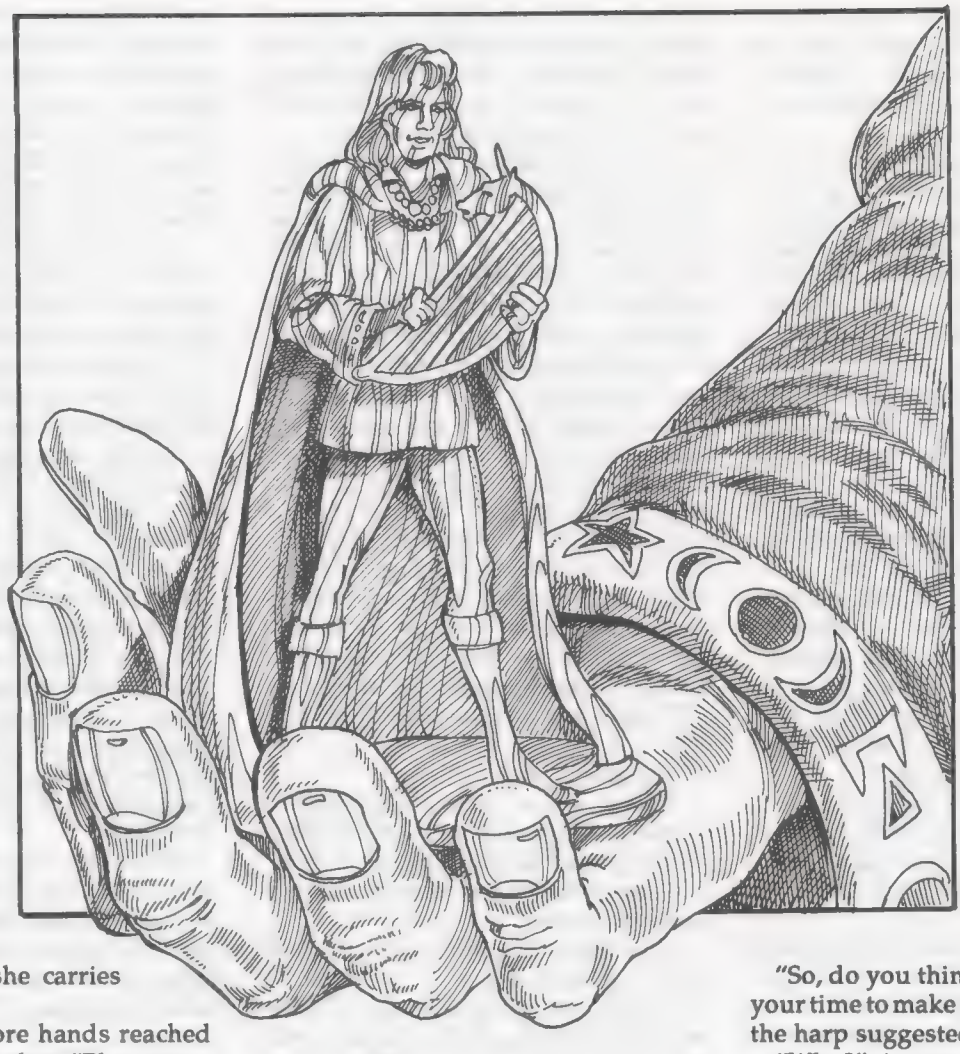
"What do you mean?" Ciaran said. He was pacing up and down the edge

of the pool, his hooves thumping in the soft loam.

Anwyn lowered his head and began to pick a melody from his strings that sounded as near as he could recall to the satyr's mourning song that the harper had so coveted. "Emer may be dying," Anwyn said in a soft voice.

For a moment, silence hung on the air like a blanket of fog. Then a pained voice whispered, "No," and a figure threw itself into a crouch before the harper. "Please — tell me that is not true!"

"I fear it is," Anwyn said, refusing to look up from his strings. "She is weak from pining for you, and the birth of the child she carries may kill her."



Artwork by James Balkovek

Silence again before hands reached out to touch Anwyn's feet. "Please, you are a mage, and I have seen the wonders your songs can work in my own healing. Can you not do the same for her? Can you not save her as you saved me?"

"What would you give me in exchange?" Anwyn asked, looking into the satyr's amber eyes that had been softened by the flow of tears now coursing his cheeks. A small pang twinged inside Anwyn for the cruelty he heard in his own voice, but he forced himself to remain firm.

"Whatever you would demand — my songs — my life."

Glynnanis? Anwyn thought. *Does he speak from the heart or the head?*

There was the magical hum of the harp's voice, soft as a petal in Anwyn's mind. "He speaks from the heart," Glynnanis said, sounding somewhat reluctant.

"Your life, then," Anwyn said. "To be lived as I choose. Will you give me that?"

"Yes," Ciaran said. "Only... what do you mean?"

"Swear to me by all you hold sacred that you will go to the cottage of Darragh and live there — that you will never take Emer or her child away from the father that loves her as much as you do," Anwyn said in as firm a voice as he could muster. "And I will know if you swear falsely, creature. After all, I am mageborn."

"Then, if I swear falsely to you, mage, kill me now, for I love Emer and only want her to live and be well with me — so if I must stay at the cottage of her father, I swear by the Four who know all, that I will do as you bid if you will but save her life."

Slowly, Anwyn nodded. "Very well," he said. "Come with me." He rose from his seat on the rock and started back into the woods. Ciaran followed, footsteps hesitant at first, then eager as Anwyn made his way back to the trail and the cottage.

"Well, you certainly got away with that one," Glynnanis said as Anwyn walked along and studied the small carving he held before him. Not only was Darragh good, he was fast, and the miniature likeness of Anwyn holding his harp had been the old man's parting gesture of gratitude.

"I didn't get away with anything," Anwyn said.

"Oh, no," Glynnanis said. "You only convinced that silly satyr that his love was dying and that taking her away from her father would kill her."

"Love makes you blind," Anwyn said with a wistful smile. "Who should know that better than I?"

"So, do you think it would be worth your time to make your sacrifice now?" the harp suggested.

"Why?" Anwyn said. "Darragh has lived his whole life without making the sacrifice. That tells me there is hope for a harper who prefers his music to his magic. Besides, when you think about it, I didn't really have to use magic to solve this problem at all. That pleases me more than any satyr's song."

Anwyn slipped the small carving into his satchel, smiling as he continued down the road while humming Ciaran's mourning song, transposing it into a far happier melody.

❄

Laura J. Underwood has had stories published in several volumes of **SWORD & SORCERESS** and *Appalachian Heritage*, as well as the continuing adventures of Anwyn and Glynnanis in this magazine. Her hobbies include hiking, history, and Celtic music.

James Balkovek heads Black Eagle Productions, a graphic arts sutdio in Antioch, California. He has illustrated numerous children's and educational books and has worked as art director for various periodical publications.

Artwork by Julia Lacquement

The Mage Who Dreamed of Gryphons

by Cynthia McQuillin

"When will we return to Basmir, Master?" Swale asked Meryl, a wistful look in his round green eyes. The toad-like servant had fidgeted about the mage all evening, watching anxiously for an opening to speak. Gathering his courage at last, he'd clutched gingerly at the sleeve of Meryl's tattered robe with stubby webbed fingers. The longing in his raspy voice made him seem almost human. "When will we return home?"

"Soon, dear servant," Meryl said, patting Swale's warty pate with long, bony fingers.

It was the first time the amphib had ever made a comment or complaint about their self-imposed exile on the desolate, gods-forsaken island of Draxus. But the supply ship was due on its biannual run, and the captain of the *Hespa* always brought greetings from family and friends, along with

Artwork by Julia Lacquement

news from Basmir. Time meant nothing to a mage, but the little toadie was no doubt homesick. It was only natural to miss family and friends, Meryl supposed, but of course *he* had no such fine sentiments. Obsession had burned them all away long before.

Perhaps it is time to return to Basmir, Meryl thought, as he climbed into his cold, narrow cot that night. Even *he* could only persevere so long without some new sign or success to sustain him.

But all thought of defeat had fled from Meryl's mind when he woke with the next dawn, for he had dreamed of gryphons. And that was something he hadn't done since the first year he and Swale had set out to discover whether or not the fabulous creatures existed in more than legend.

Those had been great years — wondrous years! He still remembered the thrill of discovering the traces the creatures had left behind on one island after another. Legends, carvings, and every manner of artifact, all were clues leading them to Draxus and to the nesting caverns high in the cliffs above. The evidence Meryl had garnered from the caves had proved not only that the gryphons were real, but that his research and calculations had been accurate. But Draxus had become a dead end for Meryl, whose true desire was to discover the living, breathing creatures themselves.

Meryl felt his way along the narrow twisting path with the aid of his staff, still haunted by the dream. Its memory scratched at his thoughts like a cat at the door. He could almost hear the echoes of distant raptor screams. See tawny leonine bodies leaping skyward, their tails lashing and claws outstretched, as powerful snow-feathered wings beat in rhythmic sweeps. Wild as the wind, they caroled joyfully, spiraling higher and higher until they were lost from sight in the glory of the sun.

Smiling to himself as the vision faded, he peered at the sea below, as if seeking some portent. The soft wash of the waves whispered encouragement as he watched their relentless curls through the rags of fog, and his certainty grew. There was no mistaking the call; some powerful sorcery drew him down to the sea.

Pausing for a moment at the foot of the cliff, Meryl scratched his chin through the tangle of wiry gray whiskers that constituted his beard. He closed his eyes, striving to catch some whiff of magic which would tell him which way to walk along the silvery strand. A subtle tug to the right decided him, and he set off in that direction, sharp gray eyes darting this way and that. The fog was beginning to dissolve in the morning sun, but there were still patches of it crowding the beach like a convocation of spirits.

In all the years he had walked this strand before, or climbed to the nesting caverns above, Meryl had somehow failed to notice its desolate beauty. This morning, he looked at the world with new and younger eyes, and nothing could dishearten him, not even remembering the years of disparagement heaped upon him by his colleagues of the Inner Court. They had derided him, one and all, for his tenacity in clinging to what they considered a foolish dream.

"No gryphon has been sighted in the memory of any mage now living," his mentor, Bazheel, had insisted, when he visited the island shortly after Meryl's discovery of the cavern. "They must certainly be extinct, and good riddance to the vicious things!"

Excitedly Meryl had brought forth the nest, the egg fragments he'd so carefully pieced back together, the tattered pelts and bones, and finally his prize, a nearly complete skeleton, ragged feathers still clinging to the skull. But the ancient, white-haired giant had remained unimpressed, insisting that it was irrelevant whether or not gryphons were real. What was needed was a solid contribution to the here and now, not pretty stories about what once was. Alchemy was a far better pastime for a young mage of Meryl's talent.

"But think of the power, Bazheel! Think of the knowledge we could gain from such a creature," Meryl had protested, his enthusiasm never waning.

"Bah!" Bazheel had exclaimed, gripping his friend's shoulders as though to shake some sense into him. "Knowledge is for scholars, stupid dreamer. Magic is for mages. Give it up, Meryl, and come back to Basmir." It was the same old argument they had every time they met. Neither ever swayed the other, but Meryl enjoyed the stimulation of Bazheel's company, no matter how querulous the old man was.

As he mused, Meryl once again heard the ghostly beating of wings in the back

of his mind. The sound drew him from his somber thoughts, making him recall the fierceness of their beauty, so vividly captured in his dream. It had been so real, so compelling, that his heart surged with renewed longing as he walked more quickly along the restless gray reaches.

Still damp and well packed from high tide, the sand was firm and easy to walk on, crunching ever so softly underfoot. Pausing to pull his cloak closer against the chill of that spring morning, Meryl stood staring towards the sea. A tingle of excitement ran through his spine as his gaze came to rest on a shadowed shape near the water's edge.

It might have been a stand of rock, or a large pile of sea-wrack, he supposed, but the outline was tantalizingly familiar. Barely breathing, he crept nearer, to discover the very creature he had sought for so long. The gryphon lay sleeping peacefully upon the sand, and from the body size and ruff of fur at the shoulder, Meryl thought that it must be a male.

What to do? What to do! Inwardly Meryl was fairly dancing with excitement, but that would never do. If he were to win his desire, he must be calm and sure. Forcing himself to think clearly, he formulated his plan. First he had to bind the creature for, true to its nature, it would surely seek to attack him or flee when roused. Murmuring the spell of binding, he settled himself down not far from the gryphon in what he hoped would be a nonthreatening posture, but he was unprepared for the fury with which the creature woke.

Sensing the spell's power as soon as it enveloped him, the gryphon came instantly alert, struggling with all of his might to break the invisible bonds. Startled, Meryl almost lost him right then, but his determination to have the creature was equal to the gryphon's desire for freedom. After several minutes of frenzied defiance, the beast quieted. The gryphon had managed to gain some ground in their first skirmish, for he had raised his head and gotten his front legs under him. As he sat, tensely eyeing the mage with a baleful expression, Meryl took advantage of the lull to examine the creature more closely.

The gryphon was old, but by no means weak. He was certainly too old to mate, though, and the mage couldn't help but wonder what had brought him here. All the evidence he'd garnered suggested the island was a nesting ground and not a regular habitat for the creatures. Surely, sparse and isolated as it was, Draxus could never have supported a year-round population of the large predators. Perhaps the gryphon had come seeking others of his kind, drawn by some memory from his youth.

Distracted by his conjectures, Meryl's hold begin to waver. But rather than trying to break away, the gryphon fell into a crouch and sprang at the mage, taking him completely off guard. Scrambling awkwardly away, Meryl gasped out the strongest stasis spell he could think of, freezing the beast in mid-strike. But he hadn't been quite fast enough. The gryphon scored his left thigh with its talons, and blood welled to soak the front of his robe. The wound, though painful, was shallow and the bleeding subsided quickly.

Be the first person on your block to wear a genuine

MARION ZIMMER BRADLEY'S

FANTASY Magazine

T-shirt!

The artwork on the front is George Barr's line drawing of a flying castle, based on the cover of issue #1. The back lists every artist and author we have published and/or interviewed in the first twenty-five issues. Printed in white on a black Hanes "Beefy T", sizes M - L - XL - XXL. Other sizes by request.

$16.95 includes shipping and handling within the U.S. (Canada: $1.50 additional. Please make checks payable in U.S. funds.)

Checks payable to Marion Zimmer Bradley.

Yes! Send me my T-shirt right away!

Size: M ☐ L ☐ XL ☐ XXL ☐

Other: _____ (I realize there may be a delay for other sizes.)

Name _____

Street Address _____

City, State, Zip, Country _____

☐ Check enclosed ☐ Visa/MC info below

acct. no: _____ exp: _____

signature: _____

"You're a tricky one, aren't you?" Meryl panted, pulling himself into a more comfortable position. Eyeing the gryphon with new respect, the mage could sense the savage joy the beast felt for having marked him. Careful not to let his guard down again, Meryl drew himself to his feet, leaning heavily on his staff, then limped out of the gryphon's line of sight. If the spell failed again he didn't want to be at the end of that completed leap.

Slowly he eased himself down, keeping his wound covered so the sand wouldn't blow into it as it dried. Deliberately he chose a position facing away from the sea, knowing from experience that the reflected light on its shifting surface might lull him into fatal contemplation, or dazzle him without warning. Then he returned to examining his captive.

By the gods, the gryphon was magnificent, frozen as it was in mid-strike — talons raking, haunches straining, wings half raised. Meryl could see its muscles begin to spasm beneath the strain of holding such an awkward position. Fearing to damage it, he reset the simple binding spell and released the stasis field, which allowed the gryphon enough freedom of movement to sink back into a sitting position once he had lowered it onto the sand.

Second round to the mage, with a penalty, Meryl thought wryly.

A hostile silence settled in, as the two combatants fell into a kind of psychic combat which was essentially a battle of wills. At first, Meryl's focus was sharp and his concentration intense, but after a while, it seemed his mind was wandering again. "I must be getting senile," he muttered to himself the third time it happened. He caught himself just in time as his hold began to slip. Then he glared at the gryphon in sudden realization.

"Oh no, you don't! I see what you're up to."

Being a creature born of magic, the gryphon had a magic of his own, and in a crude, animal fashion he had been weaving a lulling counterspell to distract the mage. But the gryphon's natural abilities were no match for a fully trained Master of the Inner Court, once he'd been alerted. Frustrated at having been thwarted a second time, the gryphon hissed, hatred glinting in his ruby eyes.

Another hour passed, and then three or four, and Meryl grew both thirsty and hungry. Cursing himself for not having breakfasted, he tried vainly to quiet his rumbling insides.

"I bet *you're* hungry too," he said aloud. The gryphon's head swiveled ever so slightly in his direction as he spoke. Taking this gesture for agreement, Meryl re-enforced the binding spell and turned part of his mind to drawing one of the scraggly island goats from the heights above.

A flicker of resistance along that tendril of thought told him that he'd made contact. Murmuring a set spell under his breath, Meryl put a portion of his power and attention into that drawing, careful not to slacken his hold on the gryphon as he did so.

It seemed like an eternity before he heard a bleating to his right, and the young nanny goat stepped nervously into his range of vision. The gryphon's hunger flared palpably at the sight of the goat, and Meryl could see the tension in his shoulder and haunch. Smiling to himself, the mage built a mental picture of himself offering the goat to the gryphon, as he urged the terrified animal forward. Cautiously dropping his hold to the barest restraint, Meryl rose to watch, tautly alert for any hostile move, with his staff firmly in hand.

As he'd expected, the gryphon started towards the goat with a shrill cry that paralyzed the poor thing. With a sigh, Meryl relaxed ever so slightly. But as he did the gryphon twisted towards the mage, this time catching Meryl's left shoulder as he leaped away. Tired and hurt as he was, the mage lost his hold on the goat, which ran off with a terrified squeal. He almost lost the gryphon, as well. Luckily he'd been too far away and too fast for the beast to do more than draw blood, but it was much harder to regain control this time. Meryl lay on his side spent and trembling, by the time the gryphon was once more in his thrall.

"It's no use," the mage laughed raggedly. The gryphon cocked his head at the sound, seemingly puzzled. "You're mine, you great beautiful thing! I've waited all of my life for you, and you are worth more than life itself to me. So you may as well reconcile yourself to that fact that I *will* have you."

After he'd rested, and the gryphon

Artwork by Julia Lacquement

had quieted, Meryl tried once again to make some sort of contact. He was certain that there had to be a way to establish rapport with the beast; after all, every court in the empire had tame lions and eagles. Surely a gryphon, embodying the qualities of both, could be tamed as well. But probe as he might, Meryl found no openness in the creature, only a strong sense of purpose. And that purpose was to strike down the man-creature that held it captive. His mind nearly as battered as his body, Meryl stared at the creature in horrified disbelief.

"I cannot tame you, for you have no soul. But I cannot release you for you will surely kill me if I do," Meryl's words were bitter, as bitter as the truth he was finally forced to accept.

Disappointment turning to rage, Meryl fell into a posture of brooding concentration, more determined than ever. If he could not tame the creature, then he must control it. Theirs had become a battle in earnest and each fought with silent deadly force. In Meryl's heart there remained no vestige of the joy his dream had wrought.

The hours passed with agonizing slowness as the two struggled, unmoving, on the sun-warmed sand. Twice more the gryphon sought to break the mage's hold, each attempt more frantic and less successful, until he visibly weakened beneath Meryl's assault, sinking slowly to the ground. Uttering his final spell with swollen tongue and aching throat, the mage brought the dregs of his power to bear...and the gryphon surrendered! Head down in defeat, as sunset washed the sky in bloody crimson, the gryphon lay, his spirit broken beneath the mage's will.

"At last you are mine!" Meryl croaked, crawling exhausted to the gryphon's side. But there was no triumph here, only defeat. With despairing remorse he stroked the sweat-matted pelt, smoothed the feathered head, trying to evoke some response from his prize. But there was none. The gryphon's wings drooped limply, fanned to either side, and there was no fire now in the creature's once fierce gaze, only death.

"How could I have been so blind?" Meryl cried, tearing at his hair in anguish. He had studied the creatures for years, and yet had failed entirely to comprehend their nature. Though physically they were the magical embodiment of earth and air, the gryphon's spirit was the wind, and no man, nor mage, had ever forged a chain to bind the wind. Men could only construct barriers to break it.

"What have I done!" Meryl sobbed, when he knew beyond a doubt the gryphon was dying. This creature was all that he had loved and sought after his entire life, his undying symbol of hope and power. By the Gods, it might even be the last of its kind! And in his ignorance and obsession, he had murdered it.

"I didn't know. Oh Gods! How could I know?"

In desperation Meryl released the gryphon from the spell, caring nothing now for his own life if it should turn on him. Praying that the gryphon *would* take his life, if only he would live. Gently cradling the great feathered head in his arms, Meryl sat in the sand, rocking back and forth like a heartbroken child, crooning, "Don't die. Please, don't die. I'll do anything, give anything, if only you won't die."

With an ache in his throat, Meryl recalled his dream once more, cursing as he did. If only he had never dreamt of gryphons, had stayed safely asleep in his bed until the creature had gone. If only he could give back the dream. But, maybe he could!

Gathering what strength of spirit still remained to him, Meryl sent his thoughts pressing back into the gryphon's mind for one last desperate try. This time he brought the vision he had carried with him from the dream, but in this waking dream, Meryl became the gryphon.

Wheeling above the glittering wavelets, he could feel the currents of the wind beneath his wings. Soaring skyward, he tasted the chill of the upper airways, experiencing intimately the thrill of swooping and diving. Lost to the joy of his flight he climbed higher and higher until clouds drifted around him like phantoms of mist dancing in the sunset.

Ever so slowly, he felt something waken within the depths of the gryphon's mind. A barely perceptible quickening of breath, the twitch of a wing muscle, hinted at life still there, an interest in living. And Meryl fed that spark with all the force he could, tears slipping unnoticed down his sunburned cheeks. At last the gryphon stirred in his arms and sat up. Startled, but unafraid, the mage released him.

"Forgive me," he whispered, hands outstretched as in supplication. "I didn't understand."

The gryphon eyed him warily for a moment, then seemed to nod. Reaching out in wonder, Meryl stroked the feathered breast once more, then watched as the gryphon stood up, took a few shaky steps to regain his balance, then furled his wings and leaped to the sky with a scream of pure joy.

"Master, speak to me?" Swale begged, rushing forward from the foot of the cliff where he had watched their silent battle for most of the afternoon. Helping Meryl to his feet, the little toadie fussed and fretted, urging him back towards the path to the house. "Say something, please," he begged as Meryl continued to alternately laugh and cry, leaning heavily on his staff as they walked.

"Ah! Horrible beast!" The amphib shook his fist skyward. "You have made my master mad!"

"No, Swale, not mad." Meryl's voice was barely a whisper. "Sane I think, for the first time in my life, truly sane and aware."

"But I don't understand, Master. You had the gryphon, and you let it go. After all these years, you just let it go. Now you have no proof."

"I have all the proof that *I* require. As for the others? Well, that doesn't seem very important any more. Never mind, old friend," Meryl said, smiling at Swale's confused expression. "Come, help me back up the path, I'm in need of some patching up, I fear. Then I think you'd better start packing. The *Hespa* is due soon, and I believe that it's time to go home."

❄

CYNTHIA MCQUILLIN has published stories in **SWORD AND SORCERESS**, **SNOWS OF DARKOVER**, and **CATFANTASTIC**, in addition to a previous story in this magazine. She is also a talented singer/songwriter and, together with her partner "Dr. Jane" Robinson, performs as the folk music/comedy duet "Mid-Life Crisis". She is the proprietor of Unlikely Publications, a specialty recording and publishing company, and can often be found at SF conventions selling her musical products and unique jewelry.

JULIA LACQUEMENT works mainly in comics, specializing in painting graphic novels. She prefers illustration work, though, from hard SF to the softest fantasy — dragons and sexy robots clash daily in her studio in Seattle, WA.

Artwork by Steve Campbell

Brimblestone, Great and Terrible

by Michael Mardis

Brimblestone surveyed his small lair carefully and gave a wistful sigh. Tiny tendrils of smoke curled around the dragon's massive head like wispy clouds on a clear summer's day. The great wyrm rose to his feet slowly, iron-hard talons scraping the rough-hewn stone of the cave floor. Brimblestone gave an angry snort. Treasure should be piled high, gleaming gold should be softening the tread of his mighty feet, rubies and diamonds should be reflecting the pale torchlight. The bare cave seemed to mock the great beast, reminding him daily that he wasn't the mighty creature that his mother had been.

"Nobody understands," he growled. "Is it my fault that I'm allergic to so many things?" The gold allergy was the worst. No one had ever heard of a dragon who was allergic to gold. Why, dragons were supposed to love the stuff but every single time that Brimblestone came within twenty feet of the shiny metal, he began to sneeze violently. For any other being, this wouldn't have been so bad, but a dragon having an uncontrollable sneezing fit is a fearsome problem indeed. Brimblestone had barely escaped with his life after vaporizing a fellow wyrm's hoard. One would have thought that he'd meant to do it, the way the other dragon had carried on.

Yeah, he thought grumpily, he could do without other dragons just fine. They were all a bunch of unsympathetic cretins anyway. They never wanted to listen to his problems, not one of them cared about how sick he felt all the time, and they poked fun at him behind his back. Why, some had even had the nerve to suggest that he, mighty Brimblestone, was a hypochondriac! What an outlandish idea! The mere thought of his unsympathetic, misinformed, treasure-hungry, knight-slaying, damsel-eating peers put the great red dragon into a black mood.

What was so great about fighting knights anyway? Hey, those guys carried swords. You could lose an eye if you messed around with something like that! Brimblestone always believed in playing it safe. Yes sir, safety first, that was his motto. Let the other dragons go around accepting challenges and attacking fortified towns. Brimblestone would be safe in his lair while the others came flying back on torn wings looking like giant flying pincushions.

And as for damsels, hey, if they left him alone he'd leave them alone. Brimblestone had never seen a damsel yet that didn't have a boyfriend or a father who would try to cause a dragon as much trouble as possible. They didn't taste very good anyway. Humans had always given the big dragon severe indigestion and who needed the grief? Cows, now that was a proper diet for a dragon. They were big, tasty and stupid. Best of all, they rarely fought back.

The giant wyrm felt a rumbling in his stomach. It was time to raid the old pasture again tonight. He was going to be more careful this time though; last

week he had nearly snatched a bull. Brimblestone had read somewhere that bulls could be very dangerous and there wasn't any use in taking chances. Being gored by a bull's horn could cause an infection and Brimblestone thought that he might be very prone to infections.

The big dragon walked stiffly to the entrance of the cave. There was a full moon tonight and the valley below was clear and bright. He looked up at the starry sky. Hopefully, there wouldn't be any bats out tonight. Bats carried rabies and no telling what other kinds of diseases. Brimblestone had never heard of a rabid dragon but assumed that it could happen if one was bitten by a bat. He had never heard of a bat attacking a dragon either, but there was always a first time.

He stretched his great leathery wings and gave them a few hesitant flaps. The cool night air certainly wouldn't do his lumbago any good, the wyrm thought worriedly. Brimblestone wasn't exactly sure what a 'lumbago' was but he was sure that he had one and he was willing to bet that night air wasn't good for it. The only alternative, of course, was to fly in the daytime. Not even the foolish dragons did that. Humans seemed to get completely bent out of shape if they saw one of the great wyrms in flight. Why, they'd go out of their way to pick a fight!

The great beast flew silently over the quiet countryside, his large nostrils sniffing the air carefully. Ah, there it was! The scent of bovine energized his body and made his tummy rumble in anticipation. Brimblestone drew his leathery wings close and dived toward the small wooden barn nestled in the clearing just ahead.

The barn was sturdily built and well kept. The large wooden doors were barred with a heavy timber, and the dragon studied the problem thoughtfully. One had to be careful; if you used your nose to lift the bar you could end up with a splinter. Brimblestone shuddered. He had gotten a splinter once, it was an experience that the great wyrm was not anxious to repeat. The delicious smell of fat cow was stronger now, nearly irresistible. "Oh, the heck with it!" Brimblestone muttered. "I suppose that a good meal is worth great danger." He gingerly extended his great snout and lifted the timber off its iron rests.

As the double doors swung slowly open, he twitched his nose and sniffed carefully. No splinter this time; fate was with him. His long neck snaked inside the dark barn, and the dragon carefully examined the row of stalls at the opposite end of the structure. Milk cows! Surely this was his lucky day! Brimblestone smiled, his razor-sharp teeth glinting in the dim moonlight. Milk cows were absolutely full of calcium and vitamins, and flu season was on its way after all.

The dragon's intended victim raised her shaggy head and snorted in alarm. "Moooooo!"

"Be quiet, stupid!" Brimblestone hissed. "Do you want to awaken the humans?"

Apparently, the bovine did want to awaken her masters. "Moooooo!"

"Wonderful," Brimblestone muttered. He was going to have to eat her quickly, and he had so wanted to dip her in a pond first. Cows were nasty creatures, one never knew just where they might have been. The great wyrm opened his mouth wide and prepared to shut the bovine up, permanently.

"Arghh!" The bellow of rage and pain shook the stout timbers of the barn. Brimblestone whirled around, smacking his head sharply on the door frame. A human pup stood in the barnyard, the instrument of pain clutched tightly in his trembling hands.

The boy's voice was high and quivering. "Begone, Dragon, before I slay you!"

Brimblestone rubbed his pierced posterior with the tip of his mighty tail. "What have you done!" he bellowed. The dragon examined the boy's weapon which was poised to strike again. "Why that's a..." Brimblestone gasped in revulsion. "That's a manure fork!"

"I ain't afraid to use it either!" the boy said defiantly.

Brimblestone gagged. "There are germs on that thing!" The dragon examined the tines more closely. "And it's rusty! Do you want to give me lockjaw?"

The boy shrugged; it was apparent that the thought didn't distress him overmuch. "You don't seem to be worried about eating our family's only cow."

The dragon sniffed. "I am a dragon, after all. What do you expect me eat?"

"Someone else's cow, preferably," the boy said. "Why don't you go find a nice deer somewhere?"

Brimblestone shook his head. "They have antlers, sharp ones. Besides, I think that they taste gamy. The last time I ate one, I had indigestion for a week."

The boy thought for a moment. "How about a nice sheep? Our neighbors have a big flock, they'd never miss one or two. Besides, I don't like them very much anyway."

"Sorry," Brimblestone shrugged. "I'm allergic to wool. I'd never manage the first bite."

"What about a hedgehog? They're a nuisance around the place anyway and I hear that they taste just like chicken."

"Nope, their spines are too sharp and it takes a pile of them to make a good meal."

"How about a mule? I know where you can find a nice tasty one."

"Too tough and ornery. Besides, they kick you when you're not looking."

The boy sighed in exasperation. "Look here, I'm not going to let you eat our only cow and if you try..." He shook the manure fork threateningly.

Brimblestone backed up a few steps and shook his head frantically. "Now, now, watch where you wave that thing!" The dragon sighed. "What do you want me to do? I've got to eat!"

The lad snapped his fingers and his young face lit up with inspiration. "I've got just the thing! Come with me!"

Once one got over the consistency, the dragon thought to himself as he took another mouthful, the taste wasn't really that bad. And like the pup had pointed out, it was high in fiber, full of vitamins and nobody got mad when he ate it. Of course, if the other dragons found out about this...Brimblestone shrugged. What they didn't know wouldn't hurt them. The great dragon burped, smiled contentedly, and took another bite of hay.

❄

Michael Mardis is a relatively new writer who is feeling fortunate to have had stories accepted by a number of magazines and anthologies in the last year. He lives in Kentucky with his wife and (according to his letter, by now) two children. His hobbies include woodworking, reading, and collecting vintage Rock and Roll.

Steve Campbell lives in San Francisco with two cats, a fancy Mac, and several imaginary playmates. He has been a freelance illustrator for ten years, specializing in computer-based images. (He sent us this illo via modem, saving one of us a drive.)

Artwork by Michael Kucharski

Kaleidoscope

by Kim Fryer

I don't know if I can let her go, Lauren thought, watching as her daughter, Raen, swept the floor of their home. Raen was dancing with the broom more than she was sweeping, her long skirts swinging as she hummed to herself. Her hair, escaping the snood at her neck, slid down her back in tendrils, streams of dark water against her crimson dress.

Lauren put aside her sewing and looked at the metal mirror upon the wall. Her reflection was blurry, but she could make out the gray hair, bound in two braids, and the deep lines that framed her mouth and eyes. Still, except for their difference in age, Raen could be a copy of Lauren, they resembled each other so — the lean, tall frame, the hawkish nose, the wide brown eyes.

Lauren sighed. But it had been too long since her features wore the raw joy etched upon Raen's — the last time had been when her daughter was just an infant. Raising Raen had brought a different happiness, though, and the past sixteen years had been among the best of Lauren's life.

"So, who is he, baby?" Lauren asked aloud.

"Hmmm?" Raen asked. She blushed as she applied herself to sweeping. She kicked aside the rag rug on the floor, one of the many items Lauren made as a seamstress. "Oh, Mama."

"The smith's son?" Lauren teased. He had recently become a guard for Naler, the village leader, and he wore his newfound importance like armor.

Raen looked up, smiling. "He's just a boy, Mama! No, you haven't met the one I love."

Lauren frowned. She knew everyone in their village and on the surrounding farms, and travelers were rare. But there was one recently...

"Not the peddler," she said sharply. He had come to their home earlier in the month with a tray of goods. But Lauren had refused to answer his knock, obeying a sense of panic at his fair looks. Where that feeling sprang from, though, she couldn't say, for she found him attractive.

"Yes, yes!" Raen said, twirling around her broom, her long red skirts flaring. "He's wonderful! And look, Mama," she said, digging into her skirt pocket, "he gave me this."

Raen held out a metal tube with an eyepiece at one end and a mirrored dial at the other.

Lauren felt ice spreading through her veins. "Stefan," she croaked, the name coming unbidden to her lips, although she had no idea what it meant.

"He called it a kal... kaled... kaleidoscope. He said you look through this end..." She raised the eyepiece, letting the broom fall as she rotated the dial with her other hand. "...and you turn this."

"No!" Lauren screamed. Instinct made her reach for Raen.

"Mama?" Raen said, looking away from the kaleidoscope just as a stream of light shot out of the eyepiece. The light blanketed the young woman from head to foot.

She vanished.

The kaleidoscope clattered to the floor, by the rug.

"Raen?" Lauren whispered, pulling her hand back, staring at the kaleidoscope on the floor.

The kaleidoscope started to revolve, the eyepiece moving towards her. Lauren moved, too, edging around the

room.

The toy spun faster, as if the eyepiece were pursuing her. It rose a handspan into the air, then more, until it was level with Lauren's face.

Lauren screamed and ducked as light shot out from the kaleidoscope. She grabbed the rug from the floor and threw it over the toy. Then she ran out the door, slamming it.

She looked wildly down the wide dirt road that wound between the rows of small houses in the village to the stone manor on the hill. It was late in the day, and no one was about to help her.

Then she saw the Enal's house across the way. She gathered up her long, white skirts and ran toward the house of the village healer.

Not more than a few paces from the door, Lauren saw something out of the corner of her eye — a flash of color, moving impossibly fast.

Screaming, she reflexively turned her head, thinking it was the kaleidoscope coming after her. Instead, Lauren saw a small, bright horseless carriage far, far below her, as if she were looking down a great chasm instead of at the dirt road at her feet. Then the vision vanished.

Without knocking, Lauren flung open the Enal's door and ran inside.

The Enal, sitting in her rocking chair, looked up from the book she was reading, blinking in surprise at Lauren. Little was in the small front room: a mirror of metal upon the wall by the fireplace, and shelves filled with the potions, powders, and ritual trinkets of a healer. Two windows faced the road, shutters open to the sun.

"He took Raen," Lauren gasped. "He's coming after me."

The Enal put her book down, squinting at her visitor. "Lauren, is that you? What has happened?"

"Stefan." The name slid from Lauren's mouth, as she tried to catch her breath.

"Oh, the demon, is it? Well, it's time," the Enal said. White hair was piled atop her head; her face was a withered apple, her beak of a nose jutting from it. Her dark eyes, though, were those of a young woman.

"Demon?" Lauren echoed, her expression horrified. "What do you mean?"

"Stefan's coming prefigures the end of the village. You must face him."

"What can I do? I only want my baby girl back!"

The Enal looked at her sadly. "She is lost to you."

"No," Lauren moaned. Images of her daughter — smiling unexpectedly at her, sleeping with one hand curled under her chin, chortling at some secret joke — flashed before her eyes in rapid succession, like a deck of cards dropped. "If she is lost, you must help me find her," Lauren said fiercely.

"I'm a healer, but I can't breathe life into the dead."

Lauren flung herself at the Enal's feet. "Raen isn't dead!" she cried, her eyes brimming tears. "I must save her, but I'm not a fighter and I have no magic to take on a demon."

The Enal laid a hand freckled with age spots upon Lauren's head. "Child, you must use your wits."

"I have none," Lauren said, looking out the Enal's window. From where she crouched, she could see her house. It was shimmering.

Lauren cried out as the front of her home disappeared in a flash of light, raining rainbow dust. Hovering in the center of the exposed house was the kaleidoscope.

It started across the wide road, toward them. As it moved, a cacophony of sound arose — the hum of carts' wheels on the path during market day, but tens upon hundreds of carts. Yet the road was empty, save for the small advancing toy.

With a cry, Lauren flung herself at the Enal's door and bolted it. She ran to both windows and pulled the shutters closed.

The Enal's eyes narrowed. "That's Stefan's device."

"Stop it!" Lauren gestured at the old woman's shelves.

The Enal shook her head. "There's little I can do. The answer is inside you. You must look into your own mirror and find the Lauren there."

Lauren shot a glance at the mirror by the fireplace, but all she saw was a blurry image of a frightened woman with hair dark as night; all she could see was Raen. "No, no, no," she cried. "Do some magic! Gods, I wish I had your power."

"Very well," the Enal said, trying to pitch her voice louder over the din. "But you will see how useless this is. Hand me the rattle."

Lauren ran to the shelves, pulled down a stick with a curved handle at one end and a pastel ball at the other, which the Enal used in rituals. The beads inside the ball rattled as Lauren handed it to the old woman, and the horrible din seemed to abate a little.

The Enal shook the rattle, its sound growing louder and louder until the traffic was drowned out.

She lowered her hand. Silence.

"You stopped it," Lauren breathed.

"No," the Enal said.

The door bulged. Lauren backed up until she ran into the bare fireplace, as the door burst into streams of light. A fine glitter settled upon the floor of the room.

The kaleidoscope hung in the doorway. Its eyepiece slowly swung toward Lauren, who stared at the toy, mesmerized.

"I shouldn't do this," the old woman muttered. "But you aren't ready to face Stefan." She shook the rattle.

The kaleidoscope stopped in midmotion, hovering. Then it swung toward the old woman. Light from the toy engulfed her, and she vanished. The rattle fell to the floor as the empty chair rocked to and fro for a moment.

Lauren hugged the wall as she stared at the kaleidoscope. She inched past the fireplace toward the door, and bumped her head on the mirror. Pulling it from the wall, she held it like a shield as the kaleidoscope swung back to her.

Light burst from the toy. Lauren shrieked and shut her eyes. She expected heat and pain, but felt nothing. Her eyes sprang open.

The kaleidoscope was frozen, encased in a stream of light solid as ice. Light spewing from the eyepiece hit the metal mirror and bounced back at the toy, holding it fast.

Trying to hold the mirror steady, Lauren reached over and pulled the rocking chair toward her. She turned it so the back was facing the kaleidoscope, and hung the mirror upon it. Not daring to take her eyes from the toy, she slipped to the doorway. The kaleidoscope jerked, as if its eyepiece were trying to follow her. With a shriek, Lauren ran out into the empty road and started down it pell mell, heedlessly holding her white skirts high.

Ahead of her, upon the hill, was the manor house of the village leader. A second passed before the sight of it registered in Lauren's mind. Then she realized that she would find aid there.

As the village leader, Naler — with her guards — protected the village from

Artwork by Michael Kucharski

brigands and formulated town policy. Naler would fight the kaleidoscope; Naler would surely bring back Lauren's baby girl. Lauren thought of Raen's hair, running through her fingers like fine-spun thread as Lauren combed it.

Her eyes blurred with a film of tears, and the houses to either side of her wavered slightly. Suddenly, she saw the village as a flat image, as if it were merely a painting, a backdrop without substance. She threw her head back and screamed, refusing to accept what was surely a magic-induced vision by the demon Stefan. She had lived there for most of Raen's life; she would not allow Stefan to destroy that.

When she reached the manor at the top of the hill, her throat was raw, and her breath came in gasps. She pounded upon the door with both fists.

The small window in the door opened a wedge. One of Naler's guards looked out. Lauren recognized the smithy's son, his beard peach fuzz upon his chin.

"I must see Naler," she said.

"Raen?" he asked uncertainly. Then, more brusquely, "What is your business?"

"A demon has come to our village. Let me in."

He stood firm, although his voice quavered. "A demon?"' He opened the door a bit and looked down at the quiet village. "I see nothing."

"It's held captive in the Enal's house," Lauren said, exasperated with the youth. "But for how long, I don't know. Now let me in." Without thinking, she passed her hand in front of his face, and the boy froze in place, his mouth open as if he were about to speak again.

"What...?" Lauren stared at him. The boy didn't move, didn't blink, even when Lauren gently slapped his face. He was breathing, though.

Have I acquired the Enal's magic? Lauren wondered. "But how...?" she muttered, as a memory unfolded before her mind's eye. She saw herself standing in a midst of a ring of white-gowned people wearing masks. One of them presented Lauren with a small, sharp knife. Before Lauren was a table on which a small body lay. A sense of power rushed through her...

Lauren shook her head, frightened by the memory. It's of no consequence, she told herself. Raen and the present are all that matter. She pushed past the

smith's son.

Two other guards tried to stop her as she made her way to the great hall, where Naler held audiences. Lauren passed her hand in front of their faces, too, and they became like ice, unblinking, unmoving.

Lauren burst into the great hall. Naler sat with a couple of the village merchants at one end of a table, which was spread with sheets of parchment. A huge empty fireplace filled one wall; another wall was lined with long windows overlooking the village.

"Who...?" Naler demanded as she rose and drew her short sword in one fluid movement . The blade was white as bone.

Lauren stopped in her tracks. "Lady?" she questioned, eyeing the sword. "I am Lauren, the seamstress," she said, although she thought Naler should recognize her.

"Lauren?" Naler sheathed the sword again, revealing a great bear engraved upon its hilt. "How did you get past my guards? They were to let no one in during these negotiations." A tall woman, Naler's dark hair was cut mannishly short, and she wore trousers and a shirt that Lauren had sewn for her. She had the same dark eyes and hawkish nose as all in the village.

"A demon has stolen my daughter, as well as the Enal." Lauren twisted her hands in front of her nervously. "You must save them. You must save Raen."

"A demon? What is this, the coming of Stefan?" Naler asked incredulously.

Lauren nodded.

The merchants looked at each other, their eyes reflecting sharp fear. "Then this is the end," one of them said, covering her face with both hands.

"The demon is legend," Naler said, "which means it may be true or it may be a tale to frighten little girls. Come," she said to Lauren. "Let's view the village and you'll tell me what you know."

As Lauren recounted her tale, they looked out the windows at the rows of small wood houses below, edged with long shadows before the setting sun.

"Something's happening," Naler said, pointing at the Enal's house. Light trickled from it, then gushed, like a flash flood. The house exploded, throwing rainbow dust high into the air.

They could just make out the kaleidoscope, a dark spot moving within the sparkling downpour.

"The mirror didn't hold it," Lauren whispered.

"Legend has it that metal cannot stop the demon," Naler stated flatly. "We shall test that."

Lauren bit her lip, wondering why she knew nothing of the demon when the whole village did. Yet, there was some part of her that did know his name.

She pushed deeper into her own mind, looking for answers, and found an image of the peddler's fair face. He didn't look demonic. In fact, his blue eyes seemed kind, concerned. But Lauren knew that he meant the end of the simple life in the village that she had built for herself and her daughter. And somehow she sensed that even knowledge of him was dangerous; she stopped probing and turned back to the village.

Below them, the toy moved forward toward the next house, spitting light, and after several moments, the small home vanished in a spray of rainbow dust as well.

"Gods," Naler muttered. "This is total destruction. No one could have survived that."

"Raen is alive," Lauren insisted, her face a mask. She remembered the feel of Raen's sweet breath against her cheek, as she held her after Raen had awakened with a cry in the depths of the night.

Naler turned away from the window. "If we attack the instrument, perhaps we can destroy it," she said more to herself than to Lauren. "In any event, we are sure to bring forth the demon, the root of all this." Naler strode across the great room and out the door. The merchants had already fled, leaving their parchments behind upon the table.

Lauren shivered. Bring forth Stefan? She wanted him gone! She turned back to the window, watching as the kaleidoscope slowly advanced upon another house. She flinched as the toy bathed it in light and it vanished in a storm of light and glitter. She hurried after Naler.

Lauren found her in the armory. Naler was barking out orders to her guards, as they buckled on armor and swords. Seeing Lauren, Naler shouted, "What did you do to my guards?" She nodded to a young woman, paralyzed in the midst of taking a step in the hallway. "Two others said you did the same to them when you forced your way in here. They have recovered."

"I don't know," Lauren said, troubled.

"Well, whatever you did, you may need to do it again. Stay here and prepare for our retreat, if it comes."

Lauren nodded, although she didn't know how to repeat it. A few moments later, she watched from a window as Naler, mounted on the only horse, and her twelve guards made their way down the hill.

Lauren looked beyond them, at the village. By the final rays of the setting sun, she saw that it was already half-destroyed. She shut her eyes for a moment as a wave of nausea passed through her, and opened them upon another scene. Giant stone buildings, bejeweled with thousands of glowing windows, towered into the sky. Far below, horseless carriages shot past, shrieking wind, belching smoke. More people than Lauren knew existed swarmed past the base of the buildings.

Lauren beat her fists against her temples, squeezing her eyes shut. "He is infecting my head," she shouted. This was a vision of hell — Stefan's world was opening like a pit to swallow her. Was Raen there? She could not be! Lauren struggled to maintain her sanity, denying what she saw and heard and smelled. "I am Lauren," she muttered. "I cut and stitch. Raen is my daughter."

The sounds of the vision faded against the force of her will. She opened her eyes, and the images were gone; instead she was witness to the destruction of the village.

Little remained, only a home here and there, and the swirls of glitter that the wind threw into the air, illuminated by the light spewed by the kaleidoscope. Naler's guards had been reduced to two. As Naler circled the toy on her mount, thrusting at it with her sword, the guards fought valiantly, ducking rays of light. They, too, struck the toy with their blades, but each blow was deflected. And as Lauren watched, one of the guard's swords swung out of control, felling the other guard.

Lauren moaned in frustration at the uselessness of it all. Force, magic, wits — seemingly nothing could stand against the coming of Stefan.

Still, she started in surprise when Naler signaled for a withdrawal. Naler, the leader who never gave up, who always fought on and on, who made the sacrifices necessary for victory. How could Naler not fight? Lauren gripped the window frame for support.

As the lone guard held off the kaleidoscope, Naler dismounted and draped the wounded guard over her horse. She smacked the horse's hindquarters to start it up the hill.

Then Naler and the remaining guard slowly started backing up the hill after the horse, dodging the light from the revolving tube.

The horse galloped up to the manor. Lauren ran to the front door and opened it. She dragged the unconscious guard from the horse and laid him inside, upon the stone floor.

In spite of his mail, his wound was deep. It would require several stitches, Lauren decided. She glanced around for her bag.

What bag? Lauren blinked. She had none. And what could she possibly do? The Enal was the village healer; the knowledge of herbs was lost with her. But an image of liquid in a tube with a needle at one end came into Lauren's head, and she started looking for her bag again.

The guard groaned, and Lauren shook herself. She was falling prey to delusions once more; she had to fight them and concentrate on the present. Lauren removed his helm, trying to do what little she could. Hot tears welled as she looked upon the young face of the smith's son.

His eyes blinked open as she struggled to loosen his mail. He stared at her, frightened for a moment, then he seemed to recognize her.

"Tell my mother good-bye, Lady," he wheezed, then coughed a stream of dark blood upon Lauren's long white gown.

"I'm not the lady..." Lauren started, as he grew still. She knew that he had died. With a small cry, she hugged his slight body to her chest, dazed by the suddenness of it all. Raen never had the chance to say good-bye to her, Lauren realized.

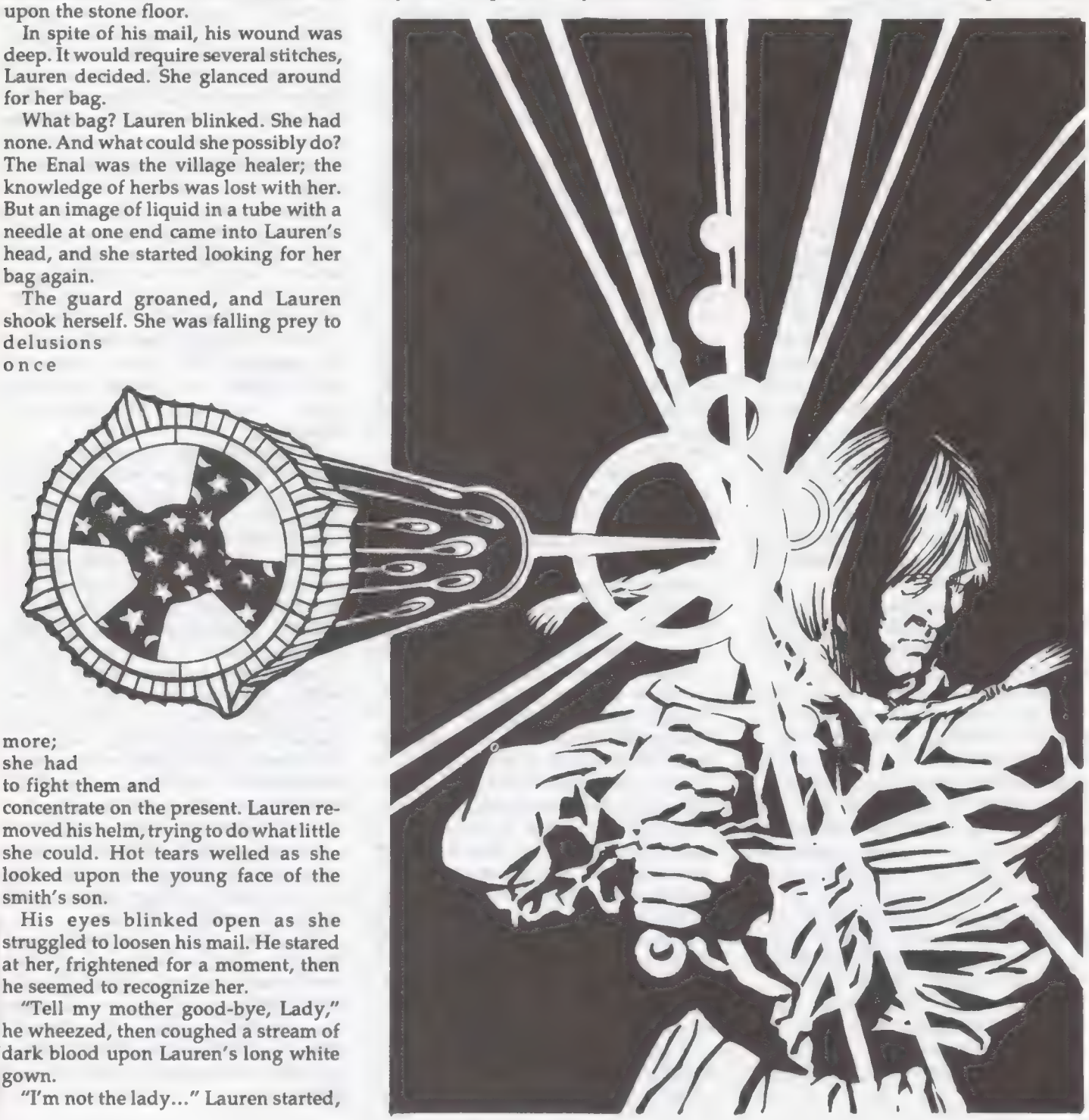
Raen isn't dead! she told herself. But she felt doubt.

A clatter at the front of the manor drew Lauren's attention. She laid him down, then hurried to the door.

The last guard and Naler battled the toy outside, paces away. Naler raised her sword, accidentally deflecting the kaleidoscope's light upon the guard. He shrieked as he exploded into a cloud of glitter.

"No!" Naler shouted, her face drawn in anguish. She flew at the toy and hacked at it, to no avail. The eyepiece swung around and sprayed her in light like mist. Naler threw her sword clear, even as she vanished.

Her braids swinging, Lauren dived for the white-blade sword. Although she had never used a weapon before,



Artwork by Michael Kucharski

she held it in front of her. As the kaleidoscope swung around and fired, she moved the sword as expertly as Naler, deflecting the light. It struck the manor house and consumed a portion of it in a spray of color and light.

Lauren muttered, "I will not leave, Stefan."

Light blasted at her, then again. She deflected each attack, moving faster than she ever thought she could. Streams of light flew about her like falling stars, gouging the countryside and destroying the remaining homes.

She shook her head, and suddenly realized there was no ground under her feet, only air. With a scream, she ducked the kaleidoscope's barrage and saw nothingness around her; no grass, no landscape, no sky.

"Stop!" Lauren cried, dropping Naler's white-bladed sword with the bear upon the hilt. She raised her hand in front of the kaleidoscope. The toy froze, as the guards had frozen in the manor house when Lauren passed her hand over their faces.

"I have power," she whispered, looking at her hand in awe. "Oh, Raen, what is happening to your mama?"

Raen. The reminder of her loss bit sharply. "You did this, Stefan," Lauren accused the kaleidoscope. "I was happy here, but you destroyed that."

The toy started to twitch, and Lauren realized her enchantment was wearing thin. As the kaleidoscope's eyepiece moved toward her, she quickly formed a mirror with her hands, pulling the power from reserves deep within her.

The kaleidoscope spit light at her and hit the mirror instead. Light reflected upon the toy, freezing it in a block of light. Lauren moved from behind the mirror; the kaleidoscope hung suspended before it. As she circled the toy, Lauren clearly saw a young woman in the mirror.

"Raen," she cried. The reflection stood straight and tall, with long, black hair in two disheveled braids, her white gown smeared with dirt and blood. The figure's mouth in the mirror echoed Lauren's glad greeting, mimicked each movement.

Then Lauren realized that she was not looking at her daughter; rather, she was seeing her own reflection. She looked closely at tall, lean woman with the hawkish nose and brown eyes, and she realized with a sudden shock that she was looking at the Enal and Naler as well.

"Gods," Lauren whispered. Reality had unwoven about her; all she had believed to be true and fast was false and unmoored. Raen, her beautiful baby, was gone.

"I can't fight any more, Stefan. You win." Accepting her loss at last, Lauren touched the toy, tipping its balance, so that its light no longer beat against the mirror.

The toy swung around and bathed her in light so profound, her eyes were blinded.

Blinking at the sudden light, Lauren sat in the rocking chair, unmoving. As her eyes adjusted, she saw a window, opened to the warm summer night, that revealed the cityscape: skyscrapers reared upward, speckled with lights; cars following twin beams whizzed by far below; people walked through pools of light cast by street lamps on the sidewalks.

Feeling drugged, Lauren let her eyes sweep the room. On one wall was a painting of a peaceful, antiquated village, with rows of tiny wood houses, and a stone manor high upon a hill. By the picture were shelves, which contained an array of baby powders and lotions; a rattle, one end curved, the other a pastel ball; a baby spoon, its bowl covered in white plastic and Winnie the Pooh engraved on the handle.

Below the shelves was the crib, empty, save for the red and white comforter Lauren had sewn herself.

"Raen," she whispered, catching her own reflection in the metal mirror that was part of a toy busy center mounted on the crib. Long, dark braids framed a smooth face.

Then she saw the broom and a disheveled rag rug against the crib, as if someone had been sweeping the floor and had been so overcome by unexpected emotion, like grief, like guilt, that she had to stop, that she had to sit down.

Lauren realized she was clutching something in her hands. She loosened them; she held a slender, metal kaleidoscope. It had been in her husband's family for generations; Raen was to have it, when she was older. But that was before...

Lauren shut her eyes, remembering the still form in the crib. Unbelieving, she had laid her hand upon the tiny, motionless back. She remembered shaking Raen, trying to awaken her. She remembered the feel of clammy flesh as she rolled her infant daughter onto her back and saw Raen's wide, staring eyes.

With a cry, Lauren had picked Raen up and shaken her gently, hoping to get her breathing. When that didn't work, she had hissed breath into that tiny mouth and performed the familiar CPR rituals.

Seconds, minutes, eons passed — still the baby was cold.

Hot tears peppered the tiny corpse as Lauren hugged Raen to her chest. For all her abilities as a doctor, for all the children she had saved upon the operating table, Lauren knew she could not bring the dead back to life. She could not save her own child from crib death.

Lauren shut her eyes, trying to block the memory, wishing she could curl up and forget it all, wishing that she didn't have to be strong, wishing that she could have a chance to see her daughter become a woman in some peaceful place...

A male voice behind her asked softly, "Lauren? Are you all right?"

Lauren took a deep breath and wiped her eyes with the back of one hand. "How long?" she asked without turning around, staring dully at the kaleidoscope in her lap.

"All day. I didn't come until evening, as you asked."

A silence fell between them, as Lauren slowly rocked in her chair. Then he continued in a strained voice, "You wouldn't answer my knock, and I was getting worried. I had to break the lock to get in. And you were just sitting here, in the dark."

"I was...I thought...if I could pack up her room that I..." She couldn't finish.

"...that you wouldn't miss her as much?" the husky voice said in a gentler tone. "It's only been a week."

Lauren looked back at him. He was a handsome man, as fair as she was dark. He stood by the door with its broken lock, one hand still on the light switch. The concern in his eyes overwhelmed her; she turned away, blinking back tears.

"We'll get through this." He came over to her and gently massaged her shoulders. He stopped when he saw the kaleidoscope in her hands. "It hurts me, too, Laurie."

Lauren looked up into her husband's eyes. They were wells of pain, as deep as her own. She remembered the joy

they had shared together in a sudden rush: the dates squeezed between part-time jobs and classes in college; their marriage in her parents' house; the lean, hectic years during med school, when his smile and his faith in her saw Lauren through her studies; the birth of their daughter.

Raen's death had buried all those good times under a mound of suffering. But looking at him, Lauren felt love course through her, strong and true.

She gave one last look to the painting of the quiet village hamlet over Raen's crib. Then she said, squeezing his hand, "I'm here for you, Stefan."

❄

KIM FRYER is a native South Dakotan misplaced in New York City. Her publications run an impressive gamut from non-fiction in Woman magazine to a comic-book story in Justice League Quarterly, to romance and confession stories in places like True Love and The Star ("no joke" she says).

MICHAEL KUCHARSKI has worked as a professional illustrator and graphic artist in the advertising and journalism fields for nearly two decades. He lives in Wyandotte, Michigan.

The Friends of Darkover wish it to be known that the Darkover Newsletter, a quarterly, is available for the sum of $7.00 annually in the U.S., $10.00 per annum in Canada, or $17.00 foreign. Payment must be either a check in U.S. funds drawn on a U.S. bank or a postal money order in U.S. dollars, payable to Marion Zimmer Bradley, Ltd.

The Friends of Darkover is a non-profit, non-dues-paying, disjointed, un-mustered group representing the span from the golden season to the golden years, and from the golden mean to the gilded extreme.

ALIEN GREYS
QUALITY TEE SHIRTS
BLACK INK ON WHITE SHIRT
IMAGE SIZE: 11" x 15" • SHIRT SIZES: MED-LG-XL

1 for $14.95
2 for $24.95
SHIPPING AND HANDLING
ADD $2.50 /SHIRT
CANADA $3.50

ALIEN GREYS
P.O. BOX 736
EAST WINDSOR, CT 06088 • B
PLEASE ALLOW 2 WEEKS EXTRA FOR CHECKS
DEALER INQUIRES AVAILABLE

BACK ISSUE ORDER FORM

___ Issue #1 (Summer 1988) – *Imagination and Reason* - Poul Anderson. *The Skycastle* - cover story by Bruce D. Arthurs; cover art by George Barr. *The Final Bet* - Marion Zimmer Bradley. *Final Exam* - Jennifer Roberson.

___ Issue #2 (Fall 1988) – *The Hitchhiker* - Jayge Carr. *Bone Serai* - cover story by Susan Shwartz; cover art by George Barr.

___ Issue #3 (Winter 1989) *The Adinkra Cloth* (a Nebula finalist!) - Mary C. Aldridge.

Issue #4 **SOLD OUT**

___ Issue #5 (Summer 1989) – "The Dragon Issue" *The Dragon, the Unicorn and the Teddy Bear* - Phyllis Ann Karr. Cover art by George Barr.

Issue #6 **SOLD OUT**

___ Issue #7 (Winter 1990) – *Daughter of the Oak* - David M. Shea. *The Hall of the Winter Folk* - cover story by Stephen C. Fisher.

___ Issue #8 (Spring 1990) "Science-Fiction/Fantasy" Issue *Change* - cover story by Jo Clayton; cover art by James Balkovek.

___ Issue #9 (Summer 1990) "Short-Short" Issue
Forty stories, PLUS articles! Short-shorts by Lackey, MZB, Paxson, Hodges, Schweitzer, Waters, Rosen, Huebner, and a host of others!

___ Issue #10 (Fall 1990) –*Satanic, Versus...* - Mercedes Lackey. *What a Wizard Does* - Janet Kagan. *Vassilissa the Fair* - Micole Sudberg.

___ Issue #11 (Winter 1991) – *Brontharn* - cover story and cover art by George Barr. *Be It Ever So Humble* –Tanya Huff. *Footsteps* - Marion Zimmer Bradley.

Issue #12 SOLD OUT

Issue #13 SOLD OUT

___ Issue #14 (Fall 1991) – *Black Ribbon* - Dawn Albright; cover by Gail Butler. *The Tengu's Scroll* - Dana Kramer-Rolls. *The Wuzzles* - M. Z. Bradley.

___ Issue #15 (Winter 1991) – *Issue in honor of Fritz Leiber;* includes article by Leiber and interview. *Queen of Summer Forests* - Isabel Cole.

___ Issue #16 (Spring-Summer 1992) – *Never Look at a Gift Sword in the Horse's Mouth* - Jennifer Roberson; cover by Alan Gutierrez.

___ Issue #17 (Fall 1992) – *Pandemonium* - Sue Young Wilson; cover by George Barr. *The White Snake* - Mara Grey. *Riddle Trial* - Deborah Burros.

___ Issue #18 (Winter 1992) – *Arakney's Web* - Jo Clayton; cover by Nick Jainschigg. *The Black Tower* - Laura Underwood. *Queeneyes* - eluki bes shahar.

___ Issue #19 (Spring 1993) – *Dreambridge* - Janny Wurts; beautiful wrap-cover. *The Theban Fix* - Karen Anderson. *Mad Sally* - Patricia Duffy Novak.

___ Issue #20 (Summer 1993) – *Cannibal Sorcerer* - Evangeline Walton & Bruce D. Arthurs. *Maiden, Are You Warm?* - Isabel Cole. *Night Stand* - Frank Tuttle. *The Basilisk* - Lucy Cohen Schmeidler.

___ Issue #21 (Fall 1993) – *First Love, Last Love* - Tanya Huff. *Mages of Carthia* - Cynthia McQuillin. *Growing Season*- Dorothy J. Heydt.

___ Issue #22 (Winter 1993) – *Mad Evren's Dreams* - Phyllis Ann Karr; cover by Alicia Austin.

___ Issue #23 (Spring 1994) – *Killer Byte* - Mercedes Lackey; cover by Vincent Di Fate. *To Kill the Undead* - Marion Zimmer Bradley.

___ Issue #24 (Summer 1994) – *Ice Princess* - Elisabeth Waters; cover by David Cherry. *The First Maxim* - Steven Piziks. Katherine Kurtz interview.

___ Issue #25 (Fall 1994) – *The Masterpainter* - Diana L. Paxson; cover by Jill Bauman. *On the Holy Mountain* - Darrell Schweitzer.

___ Mercedes Lackey Special: Issues 9, 10, 19, 23: $12.00 postpaid.

FULL SETS NO LONGER AVAILABLE — SORRY!

Get these back issues while they last! Enclose $4.95 for each back issue, plus $2.50 postage *per order* (NOT per issue!).

Name: _____

Address: _____

City, State, Zip: _____

Please enclose check or money order in U.S. currency and make payable to Marion Zimmer Bradley. Send to P.O. Box 249, Berkeley, CA 94701.

Visa/MC _____ **Exp.**____ **Signature** _____

LEARNING EXPERIENCE

BY PHILLIP WAYNE

Grenk!"

Old Master Herrion's voice still carried enough authority to wake me, especially when accompanied by a gentle crack from his wizard's staff. Oh, what a night it had been.

"Grenk, were you asleep again? I realize a wizard must learn to make the most of every opportunity, but..."

I looked around, watching the other apprentices trying not to giggle. "No, sir," I said, "I was applying the third principle of amantic meditation."

Jimsak started to guffaw, but Old Herry cut him short with a glare. "That principle," he said dryly, "applies only if you are planning to make an unsuccessful sacrifice before sunrise in the dead of winter. This is summer, if you hadn't noticed."

Satisfied that he had embarrassed me enough, he droned on. I was almost asleep when I felt that distinct nudge again. "Yes, sir," I said, stalling for time.

"Then come up to the front of the class and show us how it's done," he said.

"Show how what is done?" I asked. The previous night had left me with a head the size of melon.

Old Herry grinned, showing crooked, blackened teeth. "You said you were going to show us how to make an elemental familiar of the second kind."

I got up from my seat, trying to fathom what he was talking about. Elemental familiar ... I remembered the phrase from one of his other lectures. Why couldn't I clear the cobwebs out?

I got to the front of the class and pushed back my robe's sleeves until they were well in back of my elbows. I flexed my fingers, smoothed back my hair, cleared my throat, and was in the process of scratching my back when Old Herry harrumphed.

"The familiar, apprentice Grenk, if you don't mind. We don't have all day, you know."

"Yes, sir," I mumbled. How could he *do* this to me? I needed him off my back like yesterday's clothes. Who could I call? He talked as if he could handle anyone. And at one time had. There was no way to get out of this.

"Apprentice Grenk?" Old Herry said sarcastically. "Pray continue."

There was no help for it. Perhaps I could do one third class, or summoning the dead. They were similar, and then I could claim I had misheard him. Who could I summon? I wanted to do to him what he had done to me for so long. Perhaps, the one person I had never heard him mention. If she was anything like my own mother, that would do the job.

I made the mystical motions and chanted the chants just as I had learned them. It was only in the last few words that they differed, so Old Herry would never know until the last few moments, when it would be too late to stop it.

The usual cloud of ectoplasm formed. I muttered the rest of the spell, pointing at it with my finger since I didn't have a staff yet.

At the very last moment, I said "I invoke the mother of..." and stopped. I didn't know Old Herry's name.

"Apprentice Grenk Havil Canderby!" Old Herry shouted. "What are you doing?"

There was a loud POP.

"Grenk, you lazy, good-for-nothing wastrel!"

I knew that voice. "How long has it been since you washed your ears?"

The class roared. "Your mother, I assume?" Old Herry asked.

"Who's old horse face?" my formerly dead mother asked, noticing Old Herry.

"Get thee hence, demon!" Old Herry said, waving his staff in her general direction.

"Get yer own hence, honey." My mother had, even in death, obviously been hitting the beer a bit hard. "You called me, you keep me."

The class roared again.

"Madam," he said, "I don't want you."

My mother kissed him. Hard.

I could imagine what her breath smelled like. She'd been dead for fifteen years, after all.

Mother pulled back a bit. "Be careful what you ask for, honey, you may get it. You did this time."

Old Herry came over to me and put an arm across my shoulder. He whispered into my ear. "You called her, can't you get rid of her?"

"You're the expert," I said, loud enough for Mother to hear. "*You* get rid of her." Mother came over to both of us and caught Old Herry up in an embrace. I noticed her breath. Worse than I had thought. Not even Old Herry deserved that, but I let her play for a few moments longer.

"Tell her to go away," he whispered when he could get close.

"Are you asking me for help?" I said innocently.

"Yes!"

The class roared again.

Old Herry looked as uncomfortable as one man can be. Perhaps as two men could be.

"Will you stop harassing me?"

"Grenk!"

"Will you let me sleep in class?"

"Grenk, tell her to go away!"

"A wizard must make the most of every opportunity," I said.

"Agreed?"

"Agreed," he said, as Mother breathed on him again.

"Go away, Mother," I said, and she did.

"Grenk," he said advancing on me. "I want to see you after class. Now sit down, and no more spells for the rest of the day."

I went back to my seat, put my head down, and slept.

❄

PHILLIP WAYNE has published stories in the several anthologies and in previous issues of *FANTASY Magazine*, and has worked as a computer programmer and musician (harp, fiddle, flute, drum, mandolin, banjo, guitar...). He has published three books of music, and says, "I live with a wonderful lady and two strange cats, or vice versa."

Cream, Cake, and Colored Light

by Carol E. Leever

Shanni sat quietly beside the fairy folk and watched as the farmer's eldest daughter, Dierdra, placed a small bowl of cream beside a plate of seed cakes on the moonlit porch of the old farm house. In the tall, green grass next to the barn, the fairy folk giggled and snickered mischievously, amused by the girl's actions. Dressed in their fine silks and spider-spun clothing, they sneered at the farm girl's coarse linen shirt and woolen skirt.

Shanni sighed in annoyance. She wasn't exactly one of the fairy folk's troop, but they did tolerate her presence most nights. And they frequently spoke to her. But she liked the farm girl and didn't appreciate their cruel laughter. Dierdra had never done anything unkind to them, and she seemed genuinely to admire the Little Folk of the Woods.

"Why does she leave you cream and cake?" Shanni asked the troop before they could disappear into the night. Already some of the sprites were taking to the sky, disappearing among the bright lights of the stars.

"She expects us to grant her a favor for them," a small man in a green doublet replied. He had a beautiful felt hat upon his head, adorned with a delicate hummingbird feather. "Mortals are always expecting us to bring good fortune to them. They think that by leaving us food we will grant their wishes."

Next to the little man, a delicate silver-haired woman with tiny iridescent wings, giggled in mirth. "As if we have any use for her creams and cakes with our own fine banquet set at home. In the fairy courts we eat off golden plates and drink only the finest nectar."

The rest of the troop burst into laughter and then turned and marched into the woods, singing their lovely songs which sounded remarkably like the wind blowing through the trees. Shanni watched them in silence, torn between a desire to follow their bright shining forms, and an equally powerful desire to eat. Hunger won out.

Cautiously, she crept to the porch. Dierdra had already disappeared into the house, and the lamps had been extinguished. Only the moon witnessed Shanni's approach. One quick taste of the cream, and she shivered in delight. *Oh, how wonderful*, she thought. Someone had sweetened the cream with a sprinkle of sugar. Who needed nectar?

At dawn the next morning, Shanni climbed onto the window ledge to sit in the warm sunlight. It was perhaps the best spot on the entire farm, and when she was younger, she used to worry that someone else would take it from her. But as luck would have it, she had an invisibility spell on her. No one ever noticed her sitting in the window, and so no one ever stopped her.

She often wondered where her invisibility came from. She'd asked the fairy troop about it once, and they had just laughed and danced about her, offering no truly helpful suggestions. They simply said mortals were too busy with their own lives to ever really notice the creatures around them.

And so Shanni remained invisible. All in all, it wasn't a bad life. It afforded her the opportunity to watch everything that went on around her undisturbed.

Dierdra emerged from the house on her way to the barn to milk the cows. But she stopped first to check on her plate of cakes and bowl of cream. When she saw that both cream and cake were gone, she gasped in delight and clapped her hands together, her gaze quickly searching the surrounding woods for some sign of the fairy folk.

"Oh, please, bright folk," she whispered to the warm morning breeze, "bring me a husband. And a shining wedding ring." Then she raced off to the barn to begin her morning chores, her eyes bright with joy.

Shanni watched her leave with some concern. She couldn't recall ever hearing Dierdra plead so passionately for anything in her life. Was her life here on the farm truly in such need, that she must wish for a husband and wedding ring? And what would she do when she discovered that the fairy folk had no intention of helping her?

Of course, Shanni reminded herself guiltily, the fairy folk hadn't been the ones who'd eaten the food. She had. She wondered if that meant she was responsible for granting Dierdra's wish.

Artwork by Gail Butler

Artwork by Gail Butler

Shanni frowned down at the empty plate and bowl. It had been good cream, and though she normally didn't eat seed cakes, they too had been tasty. And she did like Dierdra. The girl had hair the color of sunlight, and a laugh so infectious it made Shanni happy just to hear it. What harm would it do, to search for the things Dierdra so desperately wanted?

Shanni jumped down from the window determinedly. She had no idea what either a husband or a wedding were, but she knew what a ring looked like. In fact she knew precisely where to find the brightest ring in the county. Come nightfall, she told herself, she'd retrieve that ring for Dierdra, and set everything on the farm right.

The moon shone pale in the night sky as Shanni approached the old wise-woman's cottage down the road from the farm. The wise-woman, Magda, would be deeply asleep by now, and wouldn't hear Shanni's approach. And Shanni still had her invisibility to protect her. It was lonely sometimes, she thought, being invisible. But in times such as these, it worked to her advantage.

To her delight Magda's front window was open, letting in the cool night breezes. Cautiously, Shanni leaped to the window ledge, looking quickly about her. She'd always been fascinated by this window with its strange colored glass. Once when Magda was away tending the sick, Shanni had stood on the window ledge in the sunlight, and watched the way the window cast a pool of bright colored light onto the carpet inside. Ever since then, Shanni had dreamed of sleeping in that pool of colored light, imagining that it must be more wondrous than even morning sunlight. But she'd never dared try. Invisibility only protected one so far—and a witch such as Magda might have spells against it.

She peeked carefully inside, searching for the bright ring Magda kept on her table. Magda's house was filled with wonderful things, crystals and ribbons and sweet-smelling herbs. People often said Magda was the richest woman in the county, and well Shanni could believe it. Her house lacked for nothing.

In the dim light of the moon, Shanni spied the bright ring sitting in its usual place on the table. It would be tricky to take it without making any noise, but she knew she had to try. Silently, she leaped from the window across the great distance to the table top. She landed soundlessly, stiffening as she listened for any sign of movement within the house.

When she was convinced all was well, she crept slowly toward the ring, and lifted it carefully. It jangled faintly as she moved it, and Shanni knew escaping soundlessly was out of the question. She'd simply have to be swift and hope Magda didn't wake and catch her.

Holding awkwardly to the heavy ring, she gathered herself for the mighty leap back to the open window. With one great spring, she flew through the air, nearly dropping the ring when it sang out in protest. Then she was outside on the cool earth and racing for Dierdra's farm house.

The moon itself seemed to pursue her as she ran, the ring singing loudly with each lumbering step. But when she glanced over her shoulder, she saw no one pursuing her. Her racing heart calmed.

When she reached the farm house, she placed the golden ring carefully on the front doorstep where she knew Dierdra was certain to find it when she awoke to milk the cows. Then Shanni climbed back onto the window ledge to watch.

How excited Dierdra would be, Shanni thought in pleasure. She couldn't wait to see her surprise. She hoped that this would fix any problems Dierdra might have, and make her life at last happy here on the farm.

The fairy troop passed by the porch later that night, and they stopped to greet Shanni.

"What is that you've left on the door-

step?" a small sprite asked curiously, staring at the golden ring.

"It is the ring Dierdra asked for," Shanni said proudly, holding her head high.

"A ring?" the others asked in unison, and then burst into laughter. "A ring!" they cried in mirth, dancing around wildly, holding their sides as if to contain their hilarity.

Shanni felt herself grow hot with embarrassment. "What is so funny?" she demanded. "You weren't going to get her the ring she wanted, so I did."

"Did you now?" they asked, still laughing at their private joke. "Oh, what a fine creature you are, Shanni! We hope Dierdra likes her ring!" With that, they danced off into the woods, still giggling in delight.

Shanni stared sullenly down at the ring. She thought it was a lovely ring — whatever the fairy folk said! Dierdra was sure to love it. But the happy mood was broken, and she spent the rest of the night worrying.

Come dawn, Dierdra emerged from the house, her golden hair braided down her back. Shanni perked up, watching eagerly and nervously from the window. Dierdra immediately spotted the bright ring on the doorstep, and frowning curiously, she bent and picked it up.

Carefully she shook the ring, listening to the clear, musical sound. Perplexed, she entered the house. Shanni watched her through the glass, straining to hear what she said to her parents and five sisters inside.

"Look what the fairy folk have left me," she announced, holding up the ring. "A bell."

One of her sisters laughed. "Didn't you ask for a husband?"

"Perhaps if you ring it loudly, it will bring one to you," said another. The rest burst into laughter.

Dierdra smiled indulgently. "Well, I think it is a lovely bell." And she dropped it into her skirt pocket and headed off to the barn.

Shanni stared after her in stunned disappointment. A bell? Not a ring! Who ever heard of anything so silly — naming something after its shape rather than the sound it made! And she'd been so certain she'd collected the correct object. She drooped in gloom — some fairy she'd make. For the first time in her life she was too depressed to go in search of her breakfast.

She sat in the window all morning, watching the farmer and his family tending their farm. Around noon, she spied an old woman walking down the lane toward the house. Shanni stiffened in surprise. It was Magda, her gray hair clipped neatly beneath a velvety cap, her skirts finely embroidered with tiny beads and colored thread. She walked with a polished cane of cherry wood, the end carved with the proud visage of a hawk. And around her neck hung dozens of bright crystals which caught the sunlight in prisms of color.

The farmer spied Magda approaching and called to his wife to come out of the house. They stood upon the doorstep to greet her. Shanni crouched down into the shadows of the window ledge, hoping her invisibility would protect her.

"Welcome, Lady Magda," the farmer nodded.

Magda nodded back, glancing thoughtfully around the farm. From the field and the barn, the six daughters were approaching curiously. "Last night, a golden bell was taken from my home," Magda announced, confirming Shanni's worst fears. "I've traced it here, to your home."

The farmer's wife gasped in surprise, and her husband frowned. "My eldest daughter found a golden bell just this morning," the farmer agreed. He motioned to Dierdra to join them.

Dierdra approached nervously, her face pale. She curtsied quickly before Magda. The old woman stared thoughtfully at the girl, her dark eyes taking in every detail of the child's face.

"Dierdra, show Lady Magda the bell you found," the farmer ordered.

Dierdra reached a trembling hand into her skirt pocket and retrieved the golden bell. She handed it to Magda.

"This is my bell," Magda replied with a frown. "How did you come by it, girl?"

"I found it," Dierdra replied in a trembling voice. "The fairy folk left it for me on the doorstep."

"Really?" Magda raised one eyebrow in disbelief. "When I went to bed last night, it was sitting on my front table."

"I didn't steal it!" Dierdra protested, eyes wide and frightened.

"My daughter is not a thief," the farmer agreed. When he saw the cold look in Magda's eyes, he sighed heavily. "Are you going to call the sheriff? You have the bell back."

Shanni shivered in terror, hardly believing what trouble she had caused. And with the invisibility spell, she couldn't even offer to take the blame for it.

Magda shrugged. "Perhaps we can make a deal instead," she replied, glancing around at the other five girls. "You have a lot of daughters, sir. Perhaps you'd like to be free of one of them?"

The farmer glanced at his girls. "What do you mean?"

"Rather than sending Dierdra to prison, I'll take her with me," Magda replied. "I could use a girl around the house — and in exchange for a bit of work, I might make her my apprentice. Providing she proves herself smart enough."

Dierdra gasped in shock at this offer, and stared at her father in stunned silence, waiting numbly. The farmer scratched his beard thoughtfully. "Can you give us a day to decide?"

Magda nodded. "If you agree, send her to me in the morning. Otherwise, I'll have to take matters into my own hands."

With that, she turned and walked away, whistling tunelessly to herself, the bell ringing softly in her hands. Once Magda was well out of earshot, Dierdra turned to her father, eyes pleading. "Oh, Father, you can't make me go to her! You won't, will you?"

"Are you insane, Dierdra?" her mother exclaimed. "This is the opportunity of a lifetime!"

"Well," the farmer said doubtfully, glancing at his wife. "I haven't said anything, but Mr. Gregor has asked for Dierdra's hand."

"Mr. Gregor!" Dierdra and her mother said in unison, both staring at him in horror.

"But father, he's had three wives already!" Dierdra protested.

"You can't exactly expect a prince!" the farmer retorted. "Not with that awful straw-colored hair of yours. Mr. Gregor was as good as I could do."

Dierdra's face fell in grief, her lips trembling as she fought back tears. Instantly, her mother placed her arms around her shaking shoulders.

"Dierdra, don't you see," she said softly. "This is a blessing we've been given. Magda can give you something far more valuable than a husband — she can give you a future."

Dierdra stared at her mother, her eyes bright with tears. "A future?"

Her mother nodded and smiled.

Artwork by Gail Butler

"You'll be a healer, darling. You'll be able to go wherever you want, do whatever you desire. You can even become the Queen's physician if you wish. That's what Magda did before she retired."

Dierdra's eyes seem to dry up instantly. "The Queen's physician?" she asked in amazement. "You mean I could live at court?"

Her mother nodded enthusiastically. "You can live wherever you want. Healers are in great demand everywhere, and Magda is one of the best."

"You could do a lot worse," the farmer agreed. "Mr. Gregor is about all you'll get here. At court you might have your pick of a dozen knights."

"She may decide not to marry at all," her mother replied stubbornly. "She won't need to."

Dierdra glanced hesitantly down the road where Magda was walking in the distance. "Well, I guess I could try it."

"That's a good girl!" her mother exclaimed, hugging her tightly. "Let's go pack your things." And the two of them disappeared into the house.

Chuckling softly, the farmer returned to his chores, leaving Shanni alone on the porch.

Shanni stared in confusion after Magda, uncertain what exactly had just happened. Had things turned out for the best after all? She wanted Dierdra to be happy, but she wasn't certain things had worked out the way they were supposed to. She hadn't, after all, gotten Dierdra any of the things she'd wished for — neither husband, wedding, or ring. Despite all her good intentions.

Shanni sighed heavily, crouching down in the afternoon sunlight. Perhaps tomorrow things would be clearer. She'd follow Dierdra to Magda's in the morning and see what would happen.

It occurred to Shanni suddenly that with Dierdra leaving the farm, she'd have no friends left at all. The other daughters weren't nearly as pleasant as Dierdra.

The morning sun lit Dierdra's way as she walked down the lane to Magda's house the next morning, all her possessions tucked neatly in the satchel over her shoulder. Behind her, unnoticed, crept Shanni, determined to see how Dierdra's new home would work out.

Magda was waiting on the porch to greet Dierdra, who curtsied shyly to the old woman and then followed her

into the house. Silently, Shanni leaped onto the window ledge and peeked inside. The window was once again partially open, and Shanni could see the bright pool of colored light clearly on the floor. She thought wistfully how lucky Dierdra was, to live in a house with such a treasure. She hoped the girl could be happy here.

Magda showed Dierdra to her room in back, and then returned a few moments later to the front room, leaving Dierdra alone to get settled.

To Shanni's utter surprise, Magda looked straight at her. "Well, Shanni," she said with a smile. "You needn't worry. You've done her a good deed. She'll have a good life with me."

Shanni stared at her in astonishment. Magda could actually see her! Her invisibility spell was no longer working! She shivered in delight and fear, wondering what would happen now. No mortal had ever spoken to her before.

Magda laughed. "Don't you have anything to say for yourself?"

Cautiously, Shanni stood up straight, determined to test herself. "Meow," she said as loudly and as clearly as she possibly could.

"Very good!" Magda clapped her hands together in delight. "Now, why don't you come down here and sit in the pretty light."

Overcome with joy at the suggestion, Shanni leaped onto the carpet into the bright pool of colored sunlight. And when Magda reached down and scratched her gently behind the ears, Shanni began contentedly to purr. ❄

CAROL E. LEEVER discovered the world of SF in the second grade and has been creating her own worlds ever since. She is an avid reader of history, mystery, and science and enjoys martial arts. She works as a teacher (hm, any connection with that last hobby?), but hopes some day to be a full-time writer.

GAIL BUTLER is well-known in the Northwest as an artist and a fan. In her spare time she is a volunteer Jewish mother to Northwest art fandom.

FANTASY WORLDS FESTIVAL '95

March 10-12, 1995, Berkeley Marina Marriot

Berkeley, California

GUESTS OF HONOR

C.J. CHERRYH AND JANE FANCHER

other guests include:

MARION ZIMMER BRADLEY, DIANA L. PAXSON, DEBORAH WHEELER, ELISABETH WATERS, CYNTHIA MCQUILLIN, "DR. JANE" ROBINSON, STEPHANIE SHAVER

Membership Info

$30 until January 1, 1995, $35 until March 1, 1995, $40 at the door

Name_____

Address_____

City/State/Zip_____

Please make checks payable to **Marion Zimmer Bradley**, PO Box 72, Berkeley CA 94701

Needles and Threads

BY VICKI MARTIN

Milady Licara was the most powerful stormwitch in Tahga, maybe even in all of Larak Drahs, and I had the same gift. From the time my granda told me my first stories about the old woman in the North Mountain tower, I knew, just knew, I'd someday be her apprentice. When Milady Licara called for applicants, I didn't even tell my father. I just packed and ran up the hill. When she chose me to replace that cheating toad Barak, I thought I'd die, I was so happy.

That was two winters past, and the novelty had long since worn off. I sat at Milady's feet in the western sunning room, my rump printed by the nap of the bearskin rug. I rubbed at the pin pricks on my fingers and swore off touching another bolt of cloth or skein of thread.

Milady's deer-bone needle wound through the bright blue weave lying across her stick-thin legs, dragging fine gold thread behind it. The peacock blue clashed with the fresh leaf green of her long robe. Milady didn't notice. But then, as frequently as she changed robes, sometimes two or three times a day, she might be a perfect match within the hour.

"Kimkee. You're woolgathering again, child." Milady offered a smile along with the gentle scold. "Hadn't you best finish carving your needles so you can embroider this when I'm finished?"

I looked down at the bone shavings strewn across my lap and the floor around me. I had two finished needles and two sore hands to show for almost a day's work.

"Milady, won't two be enough?"

"Not for this, no. I have something very special in mind for this tunic. You'll need at least four, five if you can manage it. It all depends on how you set the stitch. Trust me, child. When it comes to taming the weather or a bolt of cloth, I know what I'm doing."

True enough, but I'd come to her to learn how to be a stormwitch, not how to set a hook stitch or line up a hem – I'd been doing both since I was barely old enough to walk. I sighed again, faced the angling sunlight, and picked up the whittling knife. The bone had hardened again.

"Drying on you, is it?"

Milady put down her needle and waggled her fingers at me. I laid the sliver of bone across her palm and watched as Milady's long, spotty fingers closed around it. She closed her eyes and muttered a softening spell. When she gave me back the bone, it lay in my hand, soft as bread dough.

"I could've done that," I said.

"I know you could've, child. Old folks like to feel we're more than just living proof that our children weren't born out of the swampland ooze."

Milady Licara turned to rummage through the bowl of thread skeins on the side table and made small clicking sounds of regret.

"Now I know what I forgot when I sent you to the mercery yesterday," she said. "I'm down to the last skein of gold. You'll need more to finish the seams and set the design. Kimkee, child, be a dear and hurry down to the village before the shop closes and get me three skeins of gold. Four if he's got them."

"Right away, Milady."

"Such a thoughtful child you are." Milady smiled down on me. "Not like Barak. Nothing like Barak at all."

We were both glad of that. We were still tripping over panels and floorboards that he'd loosened in his hunt for the stormwitch's spell books.

Anxious to move, I raked the bone fragments into the hearth and put away my whittling knife. I bowed to my mistress before I turned on a heel and raced out the door.

I ran down the packed trail, happy to be out in the summer afternoon. My storm sense was alight, tingling with the powers of sun and wind. The weather on North Mountain and in the valley to the south never changed unless Milady Licara or the farmers wanted it to.

Artwork by Dameon Willich

Summer had reigned in the area for forty years, except for the time I chanced to alter the weather wards during a lesson. The village folk and farmers around Alarat hadn't much liked having a blizzard at the height of harvest. Neither had Milady.

It was an hour's walk down the mountain. There wouldn't be a lot of time before the shops closed and Alarat's gates were barred for the night. I skipped along the pebble-strewn path, picking an occasional flower despite my hurry, but I didn't stop until the outskirts of the village came into view.

The gate guards smiled at me and waved me on through. After the woodlands quiet, the village's squabbling bustle almost deafened me. I darted into the mouth of a small alley to avoid three brawls and a tumbrel overloaded with cabbage and onions. Vendors on Kicking Road called greetings to me, while Witak the Thief, locked in the middle pillory, screamed his innocence.

Lucky enough, I spotted Julias before he saw me. My ribs still remembered the last time one of Barak's cronies had caught me cutting through one of the darker village alleys. Milady's old apprentice wanted her spell books and wasn't above going through me to get them.

He should've known better. Milady Licara hadn't told a living soul where she hid her library, not even me.

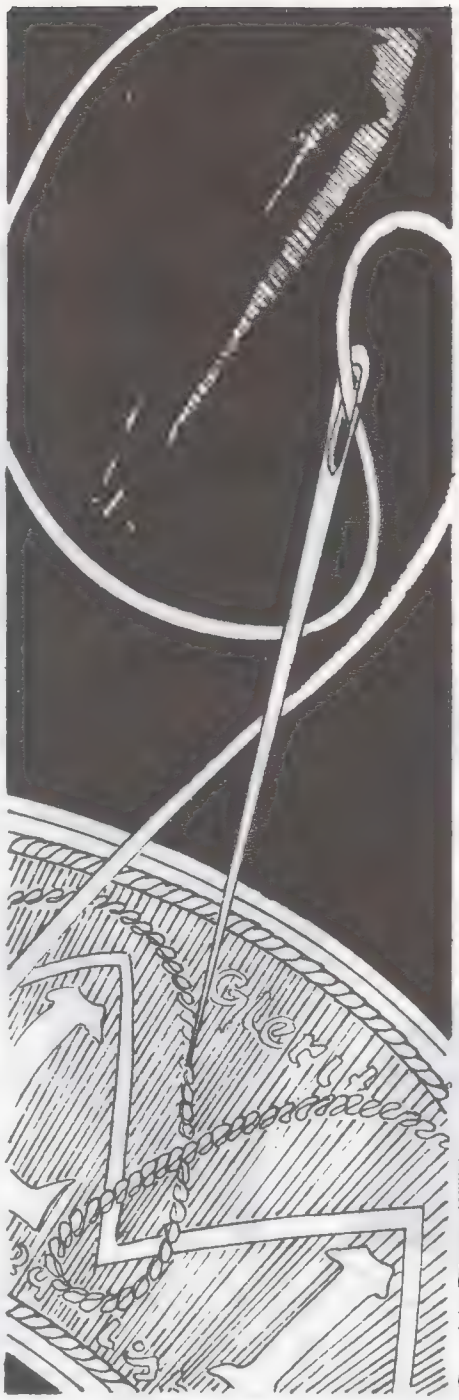
Keeping the pillory between myself and Julias, I lost myself in the crowd. Safe from hateful eyes, I hurried on to the mercer district.

Lian's shop stood on the corner, almost invisible in the late afternoon shadows. I opened the door and went inside. The scents of dye and wool were a welcome change from the fetid stink of the village streets. Racks of solid or patterned cloth filled the right side of the shop. Cushions, pins, hem sticks, and padding, and skein upon skein of brightly colored thread filled the left-hand wall. A fur table stood at the back, near Lian's desk.

"Ah, Kimkee!" Lian greeted me with a grin and a smothering bear hug. His dark eyes twinkled out of a round, wrinkled face. "It's been too long. What, only yesterday you were in here."

"Milady forgot her thread," I said.

"Ahh, that gold she mentioned. Something about clothing for you, now that you've grown so lanky in the leg." Lian poked me with his elbow then went to the racks. He held up a skein of



Artwork by Dameon Willich

gold thread. "Isn't this the color she was looking for?"

"Yes, sir. She'll need at least three, I think."

"She mentioned you'd be doing the embroidery on it next week. Better make it four."

"I don't waste thread, Master Lian."

Lian ducked his head, sheepish. "I still cringe at the memory of Barak's fumbling attempts, so please forgive this old man for forgetting that you're not Barak." He handed me a pouch with the gold thread skeins inside. "I'll charge these to Milady Licara's account. Do you need anything else?"

"Well..." I looked at the boxes of fine bone or wooden needles lined up on the third shelf. No, Milady'd said I had to *make* my needles. "No, Master Lian. Nothing."

"Good for you, girl. Barak bought the bone needles and tried to pass them off as his own. Stupid boy, should've known Milady Licara would know better."

I matched his grin with one of my own, waved goodbye, and hurried back onto the street.

The sun was westering quickly, so I didn't dally at the confectioner's shop the way I usually did. I gave a cheery wave to the gate guards who closed the portals behind me, then I trotted up the hill into the late afternoon shadows.

The sun all but vanished, except for a tiny glow right at the tip of Milady's mountain. Everything was dim, in shadow. I hurried my steps and wished I'd bought a meat pie. Dinner had been light and hadn't lasted through the day. I told my stomach to shut up and wait, and hurried my pace.

A twig snapped in the brush to the side of the trail. I stared into the lengthening shadows, eyes and ears pricked.

The reek of unwashed body and badly cured leather wrinkled my nose; I knew exactly who waited for me, and why. It wasn't the first time Barak had laid for me along the trail. This time, he wasn't alone.

I darted off the path and ducked into the dense brush.

"Damn, she saw us!" I recognized Barak's voice. "After her!"

Though I twisted and wove through the underbrush, I never totally lost them. They knew those woods as well as I did. My only friend was the falling darkness.

Twice I hid, the first by hunkering down in a thicket of thorns, the second by ducking behind a fallen log. The full moon, rising, shone off my blonde hair and light clothing whenever I crossed thin breaks in the brush.

I recognized Barak's shadow on my backtrail. He had Julias with him, and Ramis — both big brutes with half a brain between them.

Except for their blundering, the woods had gone silent, as if all the little creatures on North Mountain knew there was a hunting. A roar and a blow to the back of my head knocked every thought out of my mind.

Dizzy, I struggled against the hands

that fell on me. A second blow knocked me completely out. By the time I awoke, I lay on the forest floor, my hands tied behind my back, my face buried in rotting humus.

A rough hand grabbed my hair and yanked my head up. Barak's boxed face hovered over me, filling my vision.

"You know what I want. Tell me where the old witch keeps her spell books."

I spit the trash off my lips, straight into Barak's face, and paid for it with another slap.

"You'd better tell me, girl, or I'll beat it out of you. I slaved for that old crone for a year, and I want my due. Where's she hidden her books?"

"I don't know, and even if I did, I wouldn't tell you. Cheat! Liar!"

Barak raised his hand again. Furious, I closed my teeth around his ankle and tried to find the bone. He howled in pain, he let go of my hair, and tried to free his leg.

I twisted around and shoved both feet into his groin. His cries rose in pitch.

I made it to my feet before Julias and Ramis moved in. I bit and kicked but couldn't break their hold. I flung curses at them and swore both my own vengeance and Milady Licara's. They'd regret ever laying hands on me.

Fists beat my ribs and face. Rough hands pawed me. All the while, Barak demanded information I didn't have. For the first time, I knew that he didn't plan on letting me off the mountain alive.

Barak's voice retreated into the distance, like a faint rumble of thunder on the other side of the mountain. I floated in a numb fog, not caring when Ramis bloodied my nose. Compared to fists in my stomach, the fingers yanking my hair were nothing, yet that simple ache brought me back to what was happening.

A loose end of the hemp around my wrists brushed against my palm. I grabbed it and muttered the same softening spell Milady had used on my bone. The rope softened, leaving my hands free.

I stretched my storm sense as far as it would go. Two of Milady's weather wards were on the farthest edges of my "reach". Tapping into them burned me, but I stole enough power to tangle a passing breeze and change its course.

The wind knocked Barak's feet from under him and sent him sprawling to the ground. It hit Ramis in the face, then whirled around Julias so fast that he lost his balance and fell.

I caught a second wind current, and another, until I had a narrow stream of air as solid as a block of wood. Barak and his friends fought it, trying to reach me, but couldn't get past my defenses.

Barak fought back with the spells he'd learned from Milady Licara. The winds stripped the nearest trees bare, turning leaves and branches into deadly arrows. I staggered back, blinded.

"No!" I yelled over the gale. "I won't let you beat me!"

Anger gave the reach I needed to pull in one more ward. With its power, my wind drove Barak back. It whirled around each boy in turn. Ramis screamed as it lifted them high up into the air. I let them go in the topmost branches of the tallest tree.

"Let me down!" Barak yelled. "I'll get you for this, Kimkee! I said let me down!"

"Get *yourself* down, cheat, and I hope you break every bone doing it!" I wanted to say something more, but my face hurt too much for that.

"Very good, Kimkee."

I squeaked and turned, holding my sore ribs. Milady stood in the dappled shadow of the silver oak, her face softly smiling. The silver embroidery on her blue robe glittered in the moonlight.

"Excellent work."

"Milady, how...?"

"I always know when someone disrupts my wards. I imagine we'll have to apologize to the farmer who asked for those winds to clear the chaff off his fields. Still, they were used in a good cause and will only arrive a few hours late."

Milady gestured. My wind broke up into loose little clumps that hurried on their way. Milady frowned at me, anxious.

"Oh, your face, Kimkee. Come, back to the Tower."

"But—" I pointed at the three boys in the trees.

"As soon as we're back to the Tower, I'll send a message down to the village. The guards will deal with them. In the meantime, Kimkee, I will take care of you."

It occurred to me once I was safely in Milady Licara's own chambers in the Tower to wonder why Milady had changed robes, or why she had stopped calling me "child." Cleaned and washed, the soreness in my face eased by the chill of a snowpack, I curled up beside the fire and soaked up its warmth.

"So, Kimkee," Milady said as she settled into a chair beside the hearth, her ever-present cloth and thread draped across her lap. "What was all this about? Barak giving you trouble again?"

"He wanted to know where you hid your spell books."

"He hasn't changed. Poor boy. He had the talent but not the mind to be a stormwitch. A pity."

"I will say, I've been curious myself," I admitted. "About your books, I mean."

Milady laughed, a deep, throaty sound of merriment. I tried to hide my disappointment; I'd been beaten four shades of blue, and she still laughed at me.

"Oh, Kimkee, I'm laughing at Barak. Poor, blind boy. He could never find the books because there *are* no books! I keep my spells much closer than any library."

"I don't know what you mean."

She studied me carefully a moment, then smiled and said, "I believe you've grown enough to keep my secret, considering the fact that when I finish the basics of this robe, you'll be ready to start your own collection." She stared harder. "I took a dozen spells with me when I went to see who had disrupted my wards."

"But..."

Firelight from the hearth sparkled off the intricate embroidery around the skirt of her robe. Staring beyond the leaf designs and imagery, I could just make out the shapes of letters.

I looked through the open doors of Milady's standing wardrobe at robe upon embroidered robe. Over fifty garments, all covered in decorative thread.

"You see," Milady said as I held my sore ribs and laughed, "it really is all in how you set the stitch."

❄

Vicki Martin has lived all her life in Texas — except for one year in Japan. Her varied career has included being a waitress, live-in governess, a technical secretary, and a medical transcriptionist. She has had work published in a college journal and in fanzines but this is her first professional sale.

Dameon Willich is a regular in our pages. He lives in Seattle and has been active in the Northern Lights, an artists' group based there.

Artwork by Barb Armata

The Wizard and the Lizard

by Carl Thelen

"Perhaps, Jabbet, you could tell me a little more about this 'unique experiment' you propose," Carissa suggested, surveying the litter of jars and crucibles scattered around the wizard's workroom.

An iguana was draped languidly over a pile of dusty books. "'Unique' is a decidedly polite word for it," the iguana said slowly.

"Silence, you lump of lizard-lard!" Jabbet snapped. Then he turned to Carissa and Pearl with a wide smile. "Thank you so much for bringing your friend." He reached toward the small green dragon who stood at Carissa's side. While tiny for a full-grown dragon, Pearl still took up most of the open space within the workshop's stone walls. "May I pet it?"

"Her name is Pearl," Carissa said. "You can pet her if she lets you."

The wizard hesitated for a moment, then patted Pearl's scaly cheek. "Your dragon will be instrumental in my experiment." Though average height for a man, Jabbet stood slightly shorter than Carissa. He was a bulky man, but moved with the graceless twitching of a hyperactive chihuahua. He wore an off-white robe with narrow orange and purple stripes. His broad, floppy hat was the greenish-yellow color a painful bruise turns after seven or eight days. In spite of their outrageous cost, he had affected the recent fashion of wearing darkly tinted spectacles. His long, black, wavy hair could have been attractive if it had not the tangles of a briar bush and the smell of a fisherman's garbage.

"Since the boss didn't see fit to introduce me," the iguana said, "my name's Herman. I'm his familiar." Carissa gave him a little curtsy. "I'm pleased to meet you, Herman." Pearl smiled toward him.

Herman nodded to them both in easy reply.

"You responded most promptly to my summons," Jabbet said. "It's the least your Sisterhood could do, considering all the help I've given them in the Royal Council and Parliament."

Carissa turned to him. "Your request indicated urgency." Since it was also devoid of details, the elders of the Sisterhood had advised her to proceed with caution. They'd also said to "humor him" because he was powerful both politically and magically, though somewhat unpredictable. "We have appreciated all your help and seek any opportunity to discharge our obligations. How will Pearl help your experiment?"

Jabbet busied himself with rune-encrusted potion pots. "I want to test soul transference with your dragon. When this old body of mine gets too worn out, I want to be able to transfer myself to a younger man's body without any fuss."

"The victim will fuss," the iguana said.

"Victim? No! Any intelligent lad would be happy to give up the best years of his life to further my magical research. As a reward, I'll make him my assistant, at least until his gout makes him grumpy. All it takes is the right special potion."

"Maybe you should try it first with a human," Carissa suggested. "Me, for instance."

"You!" the wizard laughed, a tremendous, booming laugh that could knock a buzzard off a carcass a mile away. "You! A woman! An old, grey-haired woman at that! Imagine me in a woman's body!"

Though several sharp retorts presented themselves to Carissa's mind, she remained polite. "You could switch with your familiar." The thundering laughter stopped abruptly, the smile

vanished. He stared at the iguana. His voice was flat and hard. "I'll die first."

Carissa said nothing.

"My dear Carissa," he continued, his voice slipping into its normal patronizing tone, "surely you must understand that I need a stable, strong, mature beast for this part of the experiment. A mere human might lose his composure and ruin everything. Besides, I've always wanted to be a dragon, if only for a few minutes." He turned to his jars and bottles. "Let's see, reptile, green, scales, claws, tail, four legs, two wings, yellow eyes. That ought to be enough to identify your dragon. Old, cold blood for reptile..." He scraped some dark powder into a mixing pot. "Spinach for green... fish skin has scales... a contract for clause... toss in an epic poem for the tale... a chair means four legs... sunflower for yellow eyes... What's left? Ah, yes. Wings. Here we are — bat hair."

"As your familiar," Herman yawned, "I feel compelled to remind you that bats are mammals. If there's a green, yellow-eyed bat in your belfry you might find yourself hanging from a rafter."

The wizard turned a cold stare on the iguana. "Can you possibly imagine I'd be stupid enough to actually use the hair?"

"Certainly."

Jabbet turned to Carissa. "You see what I have to put up with?" He stirred the pot vigorously for a few minutes, then poured it into two red cups. "This potion identifies the dragon. We'll call it Dragon Juice." He took a bottle off a shelf and unstoppered it. "This potion, Wizard Juice, identifies me. I prepared it yesterday. It contains sugar because I'm sweet, gold symbolizes my generosity, lion blood for my power, my shredded diploma for intelligence, and bits of a cassock to show my humility." He poured the contents into two blue cups. "Funny, I thought I made more than that. No matter; this will be enough."

He turned to Pearl and pointed to one of the blue cups. "Now, dragon, you'll drink the Wizard Juice first, and I'll drink my Dragon Juice. You'll be transferred to my body on this side of the table. Then, when I tell you, you'll drink from the red cup and return to your own body. Understand?"

Pearl nodded dubiously.

Jabbet picked up his red cup, and said, "After you, Pearl."

Pearl looked at the cup, then at Carissa. Carissa wasn't sure it would work. But what if she were wrong? If it did work, then it should work the other way. Jabbet was a powerful friend, and could be a powerful enemy. If she refused, the whole Sisterhood might suffer. Still, not even her duty to the Sisterhood would make her endanger Pearl. "I'm not so sure about this."

"It's perfectly safe," Herman assured her, with a wink at Pearl. Though Carissa wasn't sure about Jabbet, Herman seemed to have a clear view of the experiment.

"Well, my scaly friend," the wizard sneered, "are you finally realizing my talent?" The iguana turned a slow, cold eye on him. "I said it was safe. Not that it would work."

Carissa closed her eyes and took a deep breath. Her greatest ability was reading auras, of people, animals, and even objects. Jabbet's layered aura indicated great power, but little control. Herman's, on the other hand, showed great control but little power. Even the pots of Wizard Juice and Dragon Juice had simple, open auras — though Carissa wondered about their little gold sparkles. She felt confident she could undo any ill side effects of Jabbet's magic, and even if she couldn't the Sisterhood surely could. Carissa opened her eyes and nodded to Pearl.

Pearl flicked out her tongue and took a tentative taste of a blue cup of Wizard Juice. She took a step back, gagging like a pig vomiting.

"Come, come, my dragon friend!" the wizard laughed. "Surely you weren't expecting Chateau Dulce, '34? It can't be magic if it doesn't taste like essence of chamber pot."

Pearl turned and nudged a water jug.

"Oh, all right." The wizard poured a bowl of water and set it next to the cup. Pearl took a deep breath, then carefully gripped the cup with her teeth. She downed the potion in one gulp, and retched piteously. Quickly she rinsed her mouth with the water and spat it out the window.

"Good girl!" Jabbet said, and drained his cup. The wizard went stiff as a board, his eyes wide. The iguana lay rigidly on the books, his legs splayed and his long tail sticking out like an arrow. Pearl glanced wide-eyed back and forth between the two of them, apparently unaffected. The wizard and the lizard quivered briefly like dogs shaking themselves dry, then both sagged limp.

The wizard looked at the iguana. The iguana looked at the wizard.

"You despicable reptile!" the iguana shrieked. "I'm in your body! You ruined the experiment!"

The wizard slowly removed the ridiculous spectacles and set them on the workbench. "Point the first: it's my body now. Point the second: it went exactly as I planned." He picked up the remaining cup of Wizard Juice, stepped to the window, and flung it out into the garden.

The iguana was in a frenzy, hopping on all four legs in a most un-iguana-like manner. "No! No! You moron! We've got to switch back! I'm your master!"

The wizard turned his head in the general direction of the livid reptile. "You were my master. Now I'm your master, and you're my familiar. These are our rightful bodies." He grinned. "And you only had one diploma."

"But you — But I — You treacherous, backstabbing, ugly beast!"

"Let me guess," Carissa said. "You had already partaken of the Wizard Juice, perhaps while he was downstairs letting us in."

Herman nodded and smiled.

"And you talked him out of putting in the bat hair because Pearl has wings and you don't. If he'd put it in, all would have gone as he planned."

"Exactly. I thank you for your help, Carissa, and for trusting my judgment over Jabbet's. Perhaps now you and Pearl had best check yourselves into the Wayward Wench Inn." He glared at the iguana. "My familiar needs obedience lessons."

"You can't intend to go through with this!" the iguana railed. "You're too stupid to be a wizard! My intelligence will be wasted in this ludicrous body!"

As Carissa closed the door behind them, she heard Herman say, "I seem to recall you said you'd die before..."

The next day Herman sent a message to Carissa. "You will be pleased to know that I have recently made three important changes around the tower.

"I donated my expensive spectacles to charity.

"I washed and combed my hair.

"And I put a muzzle on my iguana." ❄

Carl Thelen is a computer programmer interested in history.

Barb Armata lives in New England and is a favorite among our readers.

An Interview with Jennifer Roberson

by Stephanie Shaver

I first met Jennifer Roberson through her books six years ago. Since then, I have exchanged letters with her and spoken with her online, but only finally got to meet her in person at SiliCon '94, where she was a guest. I was not at all surprised to meet a lovely, energetic woman — who else could write such lovely, energetic novels?

Jennifer has written twelve fantasy novels — including the Cheysuli series and the Del and Tiger tetralogy — as well as a historical romance, **LADY OF THE FOREST**, and numerous short stories.

Although I spoke with her at SiliCon, this entire interview took place via e-mail on GEnie.

I'm going to start with the obvious question first. When did you begin writing professionally, and what made you decide that this *was what you wanted to do?*

Throughout elementary school I had been writing stories to entertain myself because, frankly, school bored me. I preferred reading to homework, and writing to paying attention in class. But it wasn't until I was a 14-year-old high school freshman that I decided what I wanted to do with my life was write books. And it came about as a challenge.

At the time my mother worked in a bookstore. So long as my hands were clean, I was free to read as many books as I liked when I stopped by the store. I have always been a very fast reader and it wasn't unusual for me to read a book in a few hours. Well, I read a YA novel about a girl and her horse, and was quite disappointed by it because it didn't live up to my expectation. I announced to my mother that I could write a better book. To which she answered, "Well, why don't you try?"

I did try, and wrote a 342-page, properly typed and double-spaced manuscript, which I submitted to Random House. It was rejected. But the bug had bitten me badly, and I was absolutely determined — and just as certain — that one day I *would* publish a book.

It took me fourteen more years and four additional manuscripts before I finally sold a novel, but I never gave up dreaming — or trying. It's tough sometimes, when you want something so badly, to be patient, to keep plugging away when there seems to be no encouragement, but it can happen. It happened to me.

When did you first begin reading fantasy, and what were some of your influences?

I grew up reading fairy tales, of course, but was not aware of fantasy as a genre until the seventh grade, when my aunt gave my grandfather (with whom I lived, as well as my mother) a subscription to *The Magazine of Fantasy & Science Fiction*. At that point I began to differentiate as a reader between fantasy and science fiction, although at that time I read much more SF than I did fantasy.

In high school I switched almost completely from reading SF to fantasy, although I don't recall why this was so. Something in fantasy struck more chords with me; I was less entranced by technology and science than I was by the concept of magic and the romance of fantasy. When I began writing novels throughout high school, I wanted to try fantasy but didn't have the guts; I loved the genre so much I was afraid I couldn't do it justice. It wasn't until 1979 that I began to mull over an idea for a fantasy novel, which I wrote in 1980. In a heavily revised form it debuted as **SHAPECHANGERS** in early 1984, the first volume in the "Chronicles of the Cheysuli".

One of the main reasons I finally broke down and wrote a fantasy series was strictly for myself, because my favorite authors weren't publishing quickly enough to suit my addiction. Some of these authors were Marion Zimmer Bradley, Katherine Kurtz, Patricia McKillip, Anne McCaffrey, C.J. Cherryh, and Nancy Springer. Although each author has a different style, I nonetheless responded very strongly to the characters, themes, adventures, and the language of the writing itself, and these aspects influenced my own work as I developed my own style. I must however specifically cite Andre Norton, for it was two of her Witch World books, in which she dealt with shapechangers as benevolent beings as opposed to representations of evil, that inspired me to create my own race of shapechangers who were the heroes instead of the enemy, albeit they maintained their aura of wildness and unpredictability.

I read then and still read for entertainment, but nonetheless each author brings to his or her work certain concepts and convictions that appeal to the readership. It's why all of us keep on reading.

Judging by the number of novels on shapeshifters that you put out (eight), one would assume that you enjoyed writing about them. Was there any specific motivation in writing about shapechangers? Did you use any general society or mythos when you designed and created the Cheysuli?

Shapechangers as characters had always appealed to me, but generally were portrayed as evil creatures. I thought it would be rather perversely fascinating — not to mention powerful and seductive — to be able to change into animal form, and wanted to see the fictional concept handled from a benevolent point of view. Andre Norton did this in two of her Witch World books, but those were the only two novels I'd read at that time that took the positive approach.

When I began the "Chronicles of the Cheysuli", I knew I would make my shapechangers the good guys. But I would still examine the frightening aspect of human beings changing to animal form, and how others who couldn't do so would perceive the ability. To them, it was evil sorcery; they could not separate the fear from reality: that the Cheysuli were good people trying to protect a dying way of life while also fulfilling a divine prophecy.

I did not deliberately use a specific mythos, culture, or

tribe in developing the series, although I certainly relied upon particular influences, especially the lifestyles, mysticism, and earth/nature- oriented religions of the American Indian. The sacred lir-bonding at puberty is the end result of a "medicine journey", a "vision quest", which plays a role in cultures the world over, but is better known in this country as a Native American ritual.

What message do you think you are trying to convey through your work, and which work do you think conveys this message the best?

I hesitate to use the word "message" because I think the connotation is that the author is forgoing story to further a private agenda, but I would definitely agree there are subtexts to my work regarding certain issues.

For instance, in the Cheysuli series one of the pervading themes is racial prejudice as well as ethnocentricity, and how people deal with such things. The Homanans fear and/or hate the Cheysuli because their shapechanging abilities are so dramatic, while the Cheysuli consider the Homanans "unblessed" because they have no magical gifts. I also bring in the theme-within-the-theme aspect by introducing the *a'saii*, an extremist group of fundamentalist Cheysuli. And finally, of course, there is the issue of religion, of personal spirituality. Everyone's is different, and I believe everyone's should be tolerated even if not necessarily approved from a personal standpoint.

In the **SWORD-DANCER** series, the subtext is much more focused and far more blatant. The entire series grew out of my desire to prove sexism for what it is: sheer ignorance and stubborn insensitivity. My goal in this series was to write entertainingly about a man and a woman as *people*, as human beings instead of Male and Female, without delegating them to specific duties, abilities, and interests simply because of their gender.

The **SWORD-DANCER** series is the story of one man's consciousness- raising, a man who is on the surface a very sexist soul in beliefs and behaviors, but because of his slave background he is more susceptible to having his mind changed. And it *is* changed when he meets a woman fully as capable as he at living a hard life and surviving by dint of wits, intellect, and sheer sword skill.

This series is meant to be fun first and foremost, but the subtext remains present. In its way it has already been effective; I have received fan letters from a young man who told me these books changed the way he viewed women. This is one of the highest compliments an author can receive: to be told that what she's written has had a positive effect on someone's life.

I understand that you train and raise dogs for shows. When did you start, and what has been your experience in this?

I've owned and trained dogs for 23 years, starting with an Australian Shepherd I got at age 18. I had horses at the time and most of us had dogs to go with us on rides, so I got Bojangles. I'd grown up with a Dachshund, but Bo was my first personal dog.

In 1976 I got Shiloh, an Australian Cattle Dog (Queensland Heeler)/Labrador Retriever mix. That year I also took my first formal obedience class, and fell in love with it. Shiloh was a naturally great worker, and he was very successful at obedience fun matches. I couldn't enter him in AKC-sanctioned obedience trials, where titles are won based on scored performance, because he was not a purebred dog; at the time, the Australian Shepherd was not a sanctioned breed, so I had no dog who could be entered in the real thing. That didn't happen until 1985, when I bought my first Labrador Retriever, a huge black male named Bubba.

Bubba was a quick learner, and by the age of 8 months he'd earned his first obedience title: Companion Dog, or CD. He was one of the top-ranked Labs in the nation. Since then I've also become active in conformation, the "beauty-pageant" part of dog shows.

Currently I own three Labradors, one of each color: Sassy, the chocolate; Keely, the black; and Gambit, my big yellow adolescent goofball. Due to a pronounced bout of bad luck, none of the Labs may be shown in conformation. (Sassy has hip dysplasia; Keely is too small; Gambit was a monorchid.) They can, however, be shown in obedience, and are. Sassy has her Companion Dog Excellent title, or CDX; Keely will be shown toward her CD this coming spring; and Gambit has been started on the fundamentals. I have been involved with obedience as a trainer and exhibitor for 19 years, and have also been a professional instructor.

I am more active right now with my fourth dog, Pilot, aka CH. KISMET CHEYSULI WLD BLU YOND'R CD, my blue merle Cardigan Welsh Corgi. (The corgi *with* the tail!) Pilot, the grandson of a Best of Breed winner at the 1990 Westminster dog show, earned his championship at the age of 13 months. A year later he gained his CD, and was the top-ranked obedience Cardigan in the country. In 1993 he added to this brag by winning Best In Show at the California Cardigan Specialty, a show limited to Cardigans only. He defeated some of the top-winning Cardis in the country (conformation), and his very-much-amateur handler — me — defeated professional handlers and big-name breeders alike. It was a very nice — and very unexpected! — win. Meanwhile, I've started him in herding (sheep), and hope to earn his CDX next year.

As this is written, Pilot is on the verge of becoming a father again, and if there is a good show prospect in the litter I will add another Cardigan to my menagerie. I have not yet bred any litters myself due to misfortune, but hope to do so in the next few years.

Photo by Beth Gwinn

For me, dog shows and obedience trials are a great way of getting off the computer, out of the office; a chance for me to talk about dogs with my fellow exhibitors and trainers. We have our own brand of "shoptalk" the same way writers do, and I enjoy it a great deal.

I would also like to say that I am a cat person also, with two in residence. Scooter Hightops and Amber-Eyes Underfoot actually run the household; they just let the dogs believe *they* do.

What other hobbies (other than dog training) do you take part in? For some reason, I thought you were a singer.

Between writing full-time for a living, plus raising, training, exhibiting, and instructing in the dog world, I don't have *time* for any other hobbies!

I think it would be fair to say my secondary "hobby", such as it is, is hanging out on GEnie. [Said with a grin.]

Regarding singing ... in high school I was quite active. I attended my first college on a vocal scholarship. I have not been active in singing for more than 20 years ... and the steroid inhaler I was put on three years ago when my asthma was diagnosed effectively destroyed my singing voice.

I am not a happy camper with regard to this. I used to be able to hit high C.

You are collaborating on a novel — THE GOLDEN KEY — with Melanie Rawn and Kate Elliot. How did this come about, and how has your experience on it been?

The genesis for **THE GOLDEN KEY** had a supremely prosaic beginning: it came about because of my divorce. In the immediate aftermath money was a bit tight, and I spoke to my agent, Russell Galen, about the possibility of making a new book deal with DAW, my fantasy publisher. Instead, Russ asked if I might be interested in collaborating with Melanie Rawn and Kate Elliott, who were also his clients, and with whom I'd been friends for several years.

The idea intrigued me, and I immediately agreed. So did Kate. But meanwhile Melanie was on a research trip to the Mediterranean, so Russ had to track her down. He faxed her in Athens, Greece, and proposed the idea. She also agreed.

From the outset, everything simply took off. All three of us felt our styles, while different, complemented one another; we also believed that whatever weaknesses we might have individually would be cancelled out by someone else's strength. We also respected and admired one another's work as peers *and* fans, so we believed from the start we could develop a strong working synergy as well as plot and write a very strong book.

One of the things we discovered in very short order was that by the time the book was finished, we would never be able to go back and diagram the plot, subplots, and subtexts with reference to who thought up what. **THE GOLDEN KEY** immediately became a genuine collaboration, a book whose parts can't be divided up and assigned to any one author. We faxed and called one another almost every day in the first few weeks, sparked a few ideas, then met for a 3-day marathon brainstorming session at my home. By the end of those three days we had plotted our plot, created a world, developed a unique magic system, outlined the romantic, cultural, and political intrigues that would confound our protagonists. We wanted to do something fresh, something that would keep *us* excited as we wrote it, so the reader would also be excited; something that would appeal to the fantasy marketplace as a whole, while also tapping into our respective established audiences.

I won't give anything away, but I will say that the artist who will be painting the cover, Michael Whelan, will be intimately involved with the shaping of the book — although he doesn't know that yet! So in a way **THE GOLDEN KEY** will be a four-way collaboration, because painting plays a very large role in the plot. We expect to see one of the finest covers Michael Whelan has ever painted.

The project thus far has proved a tremendous creative rush as well as a great deal of fun. We're learning from one another, plus creating and braiding together a very intricate world, culture, timeframe, and magic system.

Obviously we hope to write a compelling, enjoyable book, but we're also taking away from this experience a sense of creative camaraderie denied to solo authors. All of us are used to working wholly alone, relying upon our instincts; with **THE GOLDEN KEY** we're relying on one another as well as on multiple instincts.

You are also working on an anthology as editor. How did it feel being on the other end of the writing field?

The anthology I'm currently co-editing with Martin H. Greenberg is **MISTRESS OF MAGIC**, a tribute anthology celebrating the works and influence of Marion Zimmer Bradley. And while I've been wearing my editor hat for this one rather than my author hat, the situation is still a little different in that **MISTRESS OF MAGIC** is an invitational project. Because it was not an open anthology I did not have to read pounds of manuscripts, but only the stories written by authors invited to contribute. As all of these individuals are established professionals, either as novelists or short story writers, I knew their work would be first-rate and require little if any revision, and this has proved true.

The anthology is very nearly completed — may in fact be at DAW by the time this interview is published — and I'm quite excited about the quality of the stories. Despite the title [**MISTRESS OF MAGIC** was the original working title of **MISTS OF AVALON** —ed.], the anthology does not contain only Arthurian stories; there are several, of course, in tribute to Marion's **MISTS OF AVALON**, but other themes are featured as well.

Also included will be appreciations written by some of the top names in the industry, all of whom owe thanks to or appreciation of what Marion has accomplished within the field, and introductions/appreciations by Elsie Wollheim and Betsy Wollheim of DAW Books, Marion's longtime f/sf publishers.

Every author seems to have an "Odd-ball Jobs I Have Known" story. What's yours?

Oddball jobs, huh? Hmmm ... let me think ... .

I have worked as a waitress, a Kelly Girl, a bookstore salesclerk, a ski shop salesperson, an advertising copywriter, and an investigative newspaper reporter. But I'm willing to bet most people would think the oddest job was when I worked as a dog groomer.

First of all, practically no pet owner ever born understands what a brush is for, or how it is applied to the dog to keep said dog free of tangles and mats. And no pet owner ever admits to personal neglect; somehow the dog just wakes up one day and *presto!* is matted to the hilt. Thus it occurs to the pet owner that the easiest course is to take the dog to the groomer and let someone there mess with all the ticks, fleas, tangles, and mats.

Or else they're bringing in Foo-Foo for a bath, brush, and fresh bows to match the owner's brand-new manicure.

Or else they're bringing in a 220-pound St. Bernard for a bath, brush, and toenail trim — and neglect to tell us their darling Bernie has been banned from every other grooming shop in the metropolitan Phoenix area for viciousness ... which explains why Bernie explodes from the drying crate and attempts to eat the nearest poodle, who survives only because he is summarily tossed like a football across the room to the groomer farthest from Bernie.

I have been attacked by itty-bitty piranha-poodles, urinated on by cocker spaniels, battered black and blue by muzzled dogs, and had my legs raked by berserk dogs whose toenails have not been trimmed for several years. But I have also been kissed by bouncy puppies just in for their first trim, bear-hugged by friendly hounds, and lovingly slobbered upon by Great Danes and Irish Wolfhounds happily bestowing their greatest affections.

It was never a dull job. It was also a job I was not sorry to depart.

Could you discuss your job as a newspaper reporter, the ins-and-outs of journalism, and how it compares to writing fiction?

The majority of people assume if one wants to be a writer, one should major in English. Certainly I believed that, which is why, when I went back to college after my first abortive attempt, I majored in English. But I quickly learned that English classes bear little resemblance to the Real World as it pertains to writing professionally; the adage is true: "Those who can, write; those who can't, teach." That sounds harsh, I know, but my experience with the English department was less then stellar; I wanted to *sell* my work, while they wanted to discuss the art and craft of literature.

It wasn't until I took a journalism course — Magazine Writing — that I learned the discipline of the most value to an individual who actually wants to *publish* — not just write — is journalism. Within three weeks of attending the class, I sold my first article. I earned my first paycheck: a whopping $90, for a first-person humorous article about being a rodeo queen, published in the Sunday color supplement. A couple of months later I sold another.

What is most valuable in taking journalism courses is they teach you to market your work, to research the periodicals and publishers, to write to interest an editor. They also break down writing into its bits and pieces, not by diagraming a sentence, but by focusing on emphasis, on the heart of the story. The key to journalism is brevity; while a novel is rarely brief, it is nonetheless dependent upon seamless parts to refine the whole, and journalism teaches a writer how to use the language effectively — as well as economically. Expansion can come later.

Journalism courses also teach you about real life, far more so than English classes — and even though I write fantasy, the antithesis of Real Life, I nonetheless understand the way the world works because I was out on the streets as a beat reporter interviewing politicians and government agency employees. This kind of training, this kind of job, prepares an author for the requirements of *professional* writing, as opposed to pleasure writing with no aim in mind.

I tell would-be writers that a degree is not required to become successful, but a few classes nonetheless help. My recommendations are to take survey or introductory courses in journalism, history, psychology, and cultural anthropology. Journalism teaches one how to ask questions, including the "What if?" so necessary to fantasy and science fiction; history teaches what happened to cultures, and how to research; psychology offers insights into character and motivation; and cultural anthropology, in particular, allows the writer to study alien people here on earth. It was, in fact, a cultural anthropology class that inspired me to turn a stand-alone novel called **SHAPECHANGERS** into a dynastic series.

What's your pet peeve in fantasy?

My pet peeve in fantasy is the unforgivable misuse of horses. Too many authors treat them as cars, without any understanding of them, nor, apparently, any interest in portraying them accurately. Either they are treated as cars with an inexhaustible supply of gas, or they are idealized into fairy-tale horses, all beauty and romantic trappings.

The fact of the matter is, horses are as complex in personality and personal needs as humans. They are considerably larger than people and are capable, all unwittingly, of doing great damage to humans. But they are also very fragile animals who sicken easily in poor conditions and who are subject to crippling injury if not cared for properly.

Too often authors don't think about how the horses are to be fed, how many miles they may be reasonably expected to go in a day, how they react in given situations. The fact is they are *not* cars, and to treat them as such will result in what Judith Tarr calls equicide.

Those of us who have worked with horses understand how vital it is to treat them properly, and what their temperaments are like. I had horses of my own for years, and learned the hard way how to deal with them. They must be pampered in some ways, but dominated in others.

It's a simple thing to research horses, yet few authors do it. They relegate horses to means of transportation only, without regard for the health, welfare, and reality of the responsibility. Instead of relying on old wives' tales and stereotypes, authors ought to conduct research via reference books and hands-on experience. It doesn't take much to go out to a riding stable and talk to people, nor to read the how-to books.

Have you at any time owned any horses yourself?

Although no one in my family owned horses, it didn't stop me from wanting one of my own desperately. I went through the horse-crazy stage the way many girls do, only I was very fortunate. When it became clear to my mother that I was not going to outgrow the stage any time soon — I spent every spare penny and moment renting stable horses — she did me the great good favor of buying me my own. He was a huge red Thoroughbred-Quarter Horse cross, and on him I learned to barrel-race, plus a lot of other amateur rodeo events.

A few years later I bought a Quarter Horse mare, planning to go on the professional rodeo circuit. In the meantime, I won several rodeo queen titles, including Miss Rodeo Arizona, and competed in the Miss Rodeo America Pageant. But my barrel horse turned up unsound, and I decided to go back to college. I never did get back into horses; instead, I went off to Wyoming to be a reporter, came back to Arizona, and a few years later sold my first novel, which had been my dream since the age of 14.

Right now I'm so wrapped up in training and showing my dogs that I just don't have time to get back into horses. Maybe someday, when the urge to compete is out of my system and I just want one I can dink around on.

What do you have in store for your readers in the future? Are you going to continue the SWORD books?

My immediate plans are to complete **THE GOLDEN KEY**,

then start the first volume in my upcoming fantasy trilogy, which will be published in hardcover by DAW. The trilogy title is "Shade and Shadow"; the individual titles are **PRINCE OF NIGHT, QUEEN OF SLEEP,** and **KING OF DREAMS**

GLEN OF SORROWS, my Scottish historical, is finished and at the publisher, though not yet scheduled; I also owe two more historicals per contract, but haven't decided on titles yet. The next will likely will be a retelling of the legend of Red Hugh O'Donnell, one of 16th-century Ireland's greatest heroes; after that, I'm not certain. For the next few years I'll alternate annually between a "Shade and Shadow" book for DAW, and a historical.

Down the road I would definitely like to write two more Sword-Dancer novels. I have ideas and titles already: **SWORD-BORN,** which tells the tale of the adventures Del and Tiger have trying to find his purported homeland, Skandi; and **SWORD-SWORN,** which is the story of their return to the South. But I want to write all the other books first, so that when I get back to Tiger and Del I feel refreshed and ready to give them my all. They deserve it.

I don't at this time have any plans to write any more Cheysuli novels, but I may dabble with a couple of short stories here and there. I won't rule out writing another novel or two someday, but it will be quite a while. There are a lot of other new stories I want to tell.

So, through the year 2000, I'm pretty well booked up, if you'll forgive the pun. I also have stories featured in several upcoming anthologies, including **ANCIENT ENCHANTRESSES** as well as **MISTRESS OF MAGIC;** two **STAR WARS** anthologies; **SWORD AND SORCERESS 13;** and both **BEST OF MZB'S FANTASY MAGAZINE** collections. Upcoming anthology stories include one for the magician David Copperfield, who is branching into publishing; another **ANCIENT ENCHANTRESSES** anthology; and also a story for an anthology based on the bestselling card game Magic: The Gathering. Plus several other projects yet in development.

Anything you'd like to say?

Well, here's a bit of advice for new/would-be writers. Write what you love, and always write from the heart. Never try to adapt your style to a particular trend. Believe in your work, in yourself, in your dream, and if you have talent, tenacity, timing — and a great deal of luck — the dream will come true.

Thank you, Jennifer Roberson.

NOVELS

"Chronicles of the Cheysuli"
- **SHAPECHANGERS**
- **THE SONG OF HOMANA**
- **LEGACY OF THE SWORD**
- **TRACK OF THE WHITE WOLF**
- **A PRIDE OF PRINCES**
- **DAUGHTER OF THE LION**
- **FLIGHT OF THE RAVEN**
- **A TAPESTRY OF LIONS**

"Sword-Dancer Saga"
- **SWORD-DANCER**
- **SWORD-SINGER**
- **SWORD-MAKER**
- **SWORD-BREAKER**

non-series
- **LADY OF THE FOREST**

plus three novels in other genres

UPCOMING NOVELS

THE GOLDEN KEY (w/Rawn and Elliott)
GLEN OF SORROWS (Scottish historical)
"Shade & Shadow" fantasy trilogy

CO-EDITOR (with Martin H. Greenberg)

MISTRESS OF MAGIC: A Celebration of Marion Zimmer Bradley

❄

The Results of the Cauldron

Stories:

- 1st Place: **"A Dragon on the Premises" by John P. Buentello**
- 2nd Place: **"The Beginning of Tears" by Steven Piziks**
- 3rd Place: **"What Dragons Prefer" by Dayle A. Dermatis**

Artwork:

- 1st Place: **George Barr for "On the Holy Mountain"**
- 2nd Place: **Lori Deitrick for "Dreambreaker"**
- 3rd Place: **Jill Bauman for "The Masterpainter"**

Congratulations to all the winners! To vote for your favorites in *this* issue, use the ballot on page 64. Your interest and enthusiasm mean a lot to us at ***FANTASY* Magazine.**

Letters

JANNY WURTS IN PIECES

Mary-Ellen Maybee, Belleville, ON Canada

I received a catalogue for jigsaw puzzles the other day, and one of the pictures was your cover to #19, by Janny Wurts (The Wizard of the Owls). It was nice to see that others get to see some of the artwork we see every issue.

Janny's work is outstanding, and we're glad to see her get wider recognition. If you want to see the artwork whole, and without the distractions of our FANTASY Magazine logo, there will be a limited-edition print of the "Wizard of the Owls" from Mithril Press, 4060-D Peachtree Rd. #291, Atlanta GA 30319. —REH

LIFE'S CONSTANT #386: NEVER ENOUGH SHELF SPACE

Elaine M. Browning, Brighton, ON Canada

Thanks to you, I need yet another bookcase! You have introduced me to too many wonderful writers, e.g., Misty Lackey, Elizabeth Waters, Charles de Lint, Esther Friesner, Jane Yolen, Lynn Armstrong-Jones, and so, so many others! I do share my books, but now my friends are starting their own cases. P.S. I *do* love bookcases!

Watch out — soon you'll need a bigger apartment, one with a library! —REH

GOOD THINGS IN SMALL PACKAGES

Wendy Sornberger, Rexford, NY

I've never been a fan of short-shorts, but the shorter stories in issue 25 changed my mind. Stories such as "The Witch's Familiar", "What Dragons Prefer", and "Once Upon a Passion" are all well-written and thoroughly entertaining. I look forward to more short-shorts in the next issue.

Editors like short-shorts because they can be added at the paste-up stage if there's an extra page to fill. A good short-short, even if it's not funny, needs to be constructed like a joke, with some kind of buildup and then a "punch line". Writing one is good practice for anyone trying to develop craftsmanship as a writer. —REH

A PERFECT MATCH

Tim Miller, Seagoville, TX

The art work for my story ["Firecrackers"] was really cool, capturing the essence of the story perfectly, and it was an absolute thrill to see my first professional byline. I have sold other stories since, but that was my first one and I am deeply indebted to you.

When I phoned James Balkovek and described the story to him, he was really taken with the visual imagery in what you'd written. I'm glad enjoyed his silent collaboration with you. —REH

MANUSCRIPTS MUST BE OVER 21... *not!*

Brian Langston, Roseville, CA

No, I'm not trying to sell you Sears siding for your P.O. Box, nor have I ever met you on the Astral plane (on Southwest Airlines, perhaps...). Anyway, to get on with my point, I am really writing to tell you I am an author trapped in a High School student's body and would like to submit some of my works to your magazine.

One of my staff members, Stephanie Shaver, sold me her first story when she was in High School. If your story is good and professionally done, we won't "card" it at the door. —MZB

CROSSED IN THE MAIL

Louanna M. Sparks, Lake Havasu City, AZ

Yesterday I wrote a note inquiring as to when my subscription would begin, then the first issue came after my note went out. Wouldn't you know. It's a great magazine and I am looking forward to many hours of enjoyment.

When we did our recent mass-mailing campaign, we hadn't realized how long three months would seem to new subscribers. Next time we'll try to make it clearer when people can expect the first issue of their subscription. —HRJ

LETTERS NOT TO WRITE THE EDITOR

[We didn't want to embarass the writers by including their names, but we thought we'd share these prime examples of how *not* to impress an editor.]

I have selected your publication as a prospective outlet for some of my short stories .... Would you consider a story that is over your maximum length by 1500 words?

Try not to make it sound as if you're doing me a favor.—MZB

Since receiving your rejection letter I have lost all respect for you and your magazine. I can understand rejections, but how dare you call my writing unprofessional? ... For one thing, I am not a beginner. I have been writing since I was six years old ... and have won writing awards. Secondly, my work is far from unprofessional. You could even ask my writing instructor ....

When I say that a manuscript is "unprofessional" I am generally refering to technical matters like formatting and spelling rather than content. And if you want to impress me with your professional background, show me sales, not awards, and an agent, not a writing instructor. If you take rejection this personally, you should probably stay out of the writing business; even the best writers see a lot of it. —MZB

❄

Marion Zimmer Bradley Talks to Writers: The Writer's Toolbox

As I am fond of saying, even a plumber needs to know how to use a wrench. In the past, I have treated you to my opinions on the classic works of fantasy that every aspiring writer ought to have read. Today, I'm here to talk to you about nonfiction.

The first book you should buy is a book on writing style. Strunk and White is the classic of the genre. Consider investing in one of the encyclopedic works such as the **CHICAGO MANUAL OF STYLE**. Do editors really care whether your commas are all placed correctly? You bet we do! And for goodness sake, own a dictionary. Spell-checkers are all very well, but they only tell you whether the word you used exists, not whether it's the right word.

But maybe you don't need these — you got 99% in your English composition class. Then I suggest the next book you buy should be a copy of the King James Bible; not for religious reasons but because its style has had a tremendous impact on English writing.

Now you're ready to start doing research. "But," you say, "I'm writing *fantasy*, what do I need with research?" It may be strange to think of folk tales and legends as "nonfiction", but for the fantasy writer these will always be the ground on which you lay your foundations.

Read the collections of the Brothers Grimm, and the works of Hans Christian Anderson. The Celtic myths have been written and rewritten to hyperfamiliarity (this is not surprising — the Celtic cultures are the "soul" of English-speaking culture). Do yourself a favor and go read the originals, in as close a translation as you can find. You may be surprised at what you find there, and at what you *don't* find. Read the books on which the Arthurian legends are built: Geoffrey of Monmouth's **HISTORY OF THE KINGS OF BRITAIN**, the stories of Chrêtien de Troyes and Mallory. Go beyond the limits of "Western" cultures and learn the legends and traditions of Native American cultures, and African, and Indian. Thanks to multi-culturalism they aren't hard to find.

Now turn to the sciences. ("Wait a minute," you say, "I'm writing *fantasy*, not science fiction.") Read psychology, anthropology, geography, history, economics. I'm not saying you have to plow through dry textbooks — nearly every field has entertaining popularized versions available. Know something about how people work, how society works, how the world around you works. Of course you can make it all up as you go along, but do you really want to waste your reader's suspension of disbelief on the question of how a village of fewer than a thousand people could support a twenty-member thieves' guild? Or on how the reclusive scholar who has no contact with the outside world and spends all his time with his nose in a book manages not to starve? Unless these questions are central to your plot, you don't want your readers asking them.

And finally, surround yourself with the books that sparked your imagination as a child, even if they now seem puerile, such as **WINNIE THE POOH** or **THE VELVETEEN RABBIT**. Try to remember why they fascinated you. Each writer will have a separate list. I had no idea that when I first read **GALAHAD: ENOUGH OF HIS LIFE TO EXPLAIN HIS REPUTATION** or **THE PRIVATE LIFE OF HELEN OF TROY** — both by John Steinbeck, whose major works I very much disliked — they would sow in my mind the seeds that would later ripen into **THE FIREBRAND** and **THE MISTS OF AVALON**. ❄

Writers Talk Back: Unicorn Days

by James Coston Stoddard

For those of us who grew up in the late '60s and early '70s, the years between 1969 and 1974 were the golden years in fantasy literature. It was during this six-year period that Ballantine Books, under the auspices of Editorial Consultant Lin Carter, introduced the "Sign of the Unicorn" line of Adult Fantasy books, a series which was to publish some of the finest fantasy ever written. Although the series was based on the success of Tolkien's **THE LORD OF THE RINGS**, most of the books were classics predating Tolkien and owing nothing to his influence. At that time, under the ownership of Ian and Betty Ballantine, Ballantine Books seemed more like a quality, niche-marketing house than a mass marketer. A deep love of books pervaded their titles.

I was fourteen when my high school English teacher handed out an order form containing, among other books, **THE HOBBIT** and **THE LORD OF THE RINGS**. I had heard they were good, so I ordered all four volumes on a chance. Four dollars was not an insignificant sum in those days, but I had

scarcely left Bag End with Bilbo before I knew I was onto Something Big.

At the back of the Tolkien books was a modest request form for Ballantine's catalog of current titles. As memory serves, the catalog turned out to be a 9 by 12 inch, glossy, first-class brochure with pictures of the book covers in black and white. Soon I was ordering titles through the mail and searching for them in local bookstores.

Throughout each book, Lin Carter served as host and guide. He was much more than just the Consulting Editor of the titles. Drawing on his extensive reading of fantasy literature, he chose works of beauty and power and grace that burned into my young heart. Because of his enthusiasm, his spirited introductions became very much part of my reading experience. Although I never met him — never exchanged correspondence or heard him speak — he became my friend and mentor, a man who understood a literature that was very important to me. It was as if we were two old acquaintances, the older and the younger, he pointing here and there saying, "Have you seen this? Did you notice that? Now, look here."

Together we saw it all. I remember as Lin and I climbed onto the back of a reptilian shrowk to fly above the mountains of the Ifdawn Marest with Maskull and the wild and beautiful Oceaxe in David Lindsay's **A VOYAGE TO ARCTURUS**. Or when we stood by the cairn with Rhiannon in the world of the Mabinogion, the Welsh Iliad, through the works of Evangeline Walton, a quartet of books beginning with **THE ISLAND OF THE MIGHTY**. [Note: although this title was the first of the series published, it is actually last in the series chronologically. —ed] Parched with thirst, Lin and I crossed the burning deserts of the dying continent **ZOTHIQUE** and stood frozen in fear with Ralibar Vooz in the caves of **HYPERBOREA** with Clark Ashton Smith. We crept down the seven hundred onyx steps and beyond the Gates of Deeper Slumber with H.P. Lovecraft in **THE DREAM QUEST OF UNKNOWN KADATH**. We eyed one another in silent awe as we fled from the descending Powers of Evil, through the Utter Darkness, toward the safety of the towering Great Redoubt of William Hope Hodgson's **THE NIGHT LAND**, that bizarre and beautifully flawed story of an earth whose sun has died. Swords in hand, we fought the bloody manticore upon Koshtra Pivrarcha with Lord Juss and Lord Brandoch Daha in E.R. Eddison's **THE WORM OUROBOROS**, a work written with power and elegance in archaic English.

Exhausted, heads spinning, panting, we threw ourselves down to rest. But after a moment Lin and I looked at each other and nodded. He smiled and said, "Let's do it all again." I would have followed him anywhere.

We slipped past the Pool of the Blue Flamingo through the Gate of Khoire in Hannes Bok's **BEYOND THE GOLDEN STAIR**. We crossed into Faery itself with Alveric to win the heart of the Princess Lirazel in **THE KING OF ELFLAND'S DAUGHTER** with Lord Dunsany, possibly the greatest writer of prose in the English language. We crossed those borders again, this time through Dreamland with C.S. Lewis's old mentor, the Scotsman George MacDonald in **PHANTASTES** and in **LILITH**. We trod the dusty roads to Utterbol to **THE WELL AT THE WORLD'S END** with a genuine Renaissance man in both the arts and literature, William Morris, who might well be called the father of modern fantasy. Lin and I donned masks and gave chase through the streets of turn-of-the-century London in G.K. Chesterton's farcical **THE MAN WHO WAS THURSDAY** and pondered detective's mysteries in Arthur Machen's **THE THREE IMPOSTORS**. We traveled to the East, in George Meredith's seductive oriental fantasy **THE SHAVING OF SHAGPAT**, where I held the hair, while Lin wielded the scissors. We bottled genies in F. Marion Crawford's **KHALED**, saw the gates of Hell itself in William Beckford's bejeweled **VATHEK**, and sat by the roadside in China to watch the great oriental storyteller, Kai Lung himself, unroll his mat and spin his tales in Ernest Bramah's **KAI LUNG'S GOLDEN HOURS**.

In works of his own, such as Lin Carter's **TOLKIEN: A LOOK BEHIND THE LORD OF THE RINGS**, we sat down for a fireside chat to discuss the making and origins of fantasy. **IMAGINARY WORLDS** should be a textbook for all fantasy writers everywhere, as it traces the origins and essentials of creating a full-blown fantasy world.

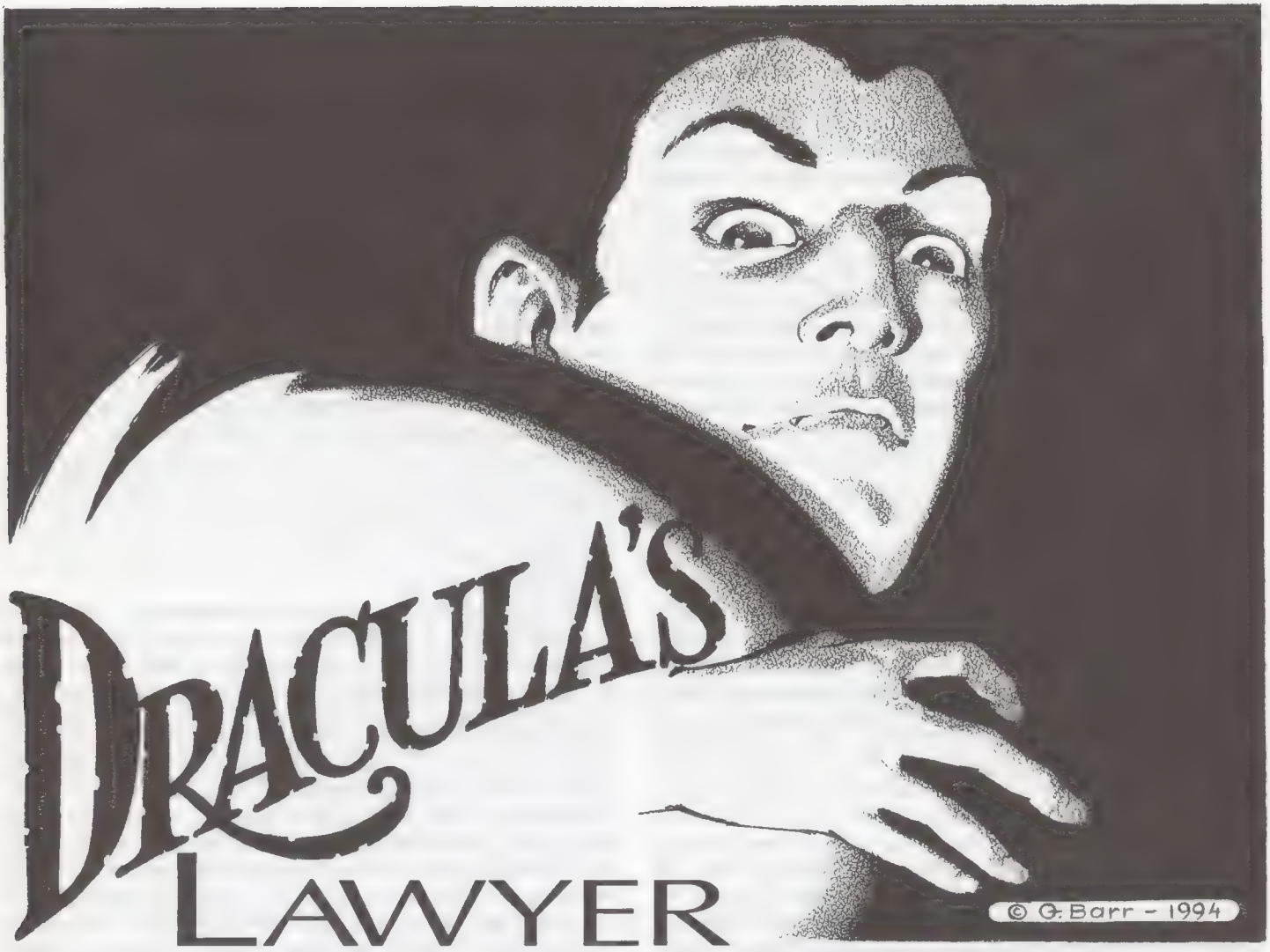
When new writers finally began to surface, Lin brought me the book I consider one of the greatest fantasies of all time, **RED MOON AND BLACK MOUNTAIN**, by Joy Chant. It is nothing less than a masterpiece. Katherine Kurtz, writer of the popular Deryni books, also received her start in the Sign of the Unicorn series.

The look of the series was as distinctive as the works themselves due to the wonderful, abstract wrap-around covers commissioned by Ian and Betty Ballantine. Three principal artists did most of the work on the series: Gervasio Gallardo, whose most striking cover was that of **A FINE AND PRIVATE PLACE** by Peter S. Beagle; Robert LoGrippo, whose distinctive mosaic style decorated **THE NIGHT LAND, THE THREE IMPOSTORS**, and, his best work of all, **THE BOATS OF THE 'GLEN CARRIG'**, by William Hope Hodgson, a beautiful mosaic of men facing unimaginable terrors at sea; and my favorite artist, Bob Pepper, who was working with dyes at that time. Mr. Pepper created the three extraordinary covers for the **GORMENGHAST** books by Mervyn Peake, which, laid side by side, represent a single painting. He also painted the covers for many of the James Branch Cabell books, for Poul Anderson's **HROLF KRAKI'S SAGA**, Dunsany's **DON RODRIGUEZ**, and rendered the darkly beautiful work on **RED MOON AND BLACK MOUNTAIN**. His best illustration must surely be for **THE KING OF ELFLAND'S DAUGHTER**. With its colorful, bright dyes, ivory-skinned figures, and the white unicorn rearing its head onto the solid black background, it is a magnificent cover.

After Ballantine Books was purchased by Random House, Lin Carter edited a yearly fantasy anthology for DAW books for six years, then I lost track of him. I remember standing in a bookstore browsing through a copy of **THE OFFICIAL PRICE GUIDE TO SCIENCE FICTION AND FANTASY** by Don and Maggie Thompson, when I saw Lin Carter's name, with the date of his death below. My face went pale. I fought back shock and grief. The friend I never knew was dead, passed away almost two years before. I stood in that strange, sudden loss one can only feel for someone whose words touched them only through the printed page. I had never expressed my appreciation for his work. I had not even known the day that he died.

I think of him every time I look at those glorious fantasies upon my bookshelf. I hope someday to contact his family and tell them how much he meant to me.

❄



Artwork by George Barr

BY JULIA S. MANDALA

I always seem to get the really weird cases, maybe because I'm a sucker for hard luck stories, or maybe because I set up shop in a renovated French Quarter town house, just down the street from the Voodoo Museum in New Orleans. Or maybe it was because, unlike most of my fellow lawyers, I hold regular office hours on Tuesday and Thursday evenings. Many of my clients are working class folk who can't afford to take off from their jobs to see an attorney. Others, it seems, only come out at night.

My strangest case began one stormy, windy Tuesday evening, as I sat at my secretary's desk, reviewing a brief and keeping an eye on the front door. Rain pounded in waves against the lead panes of the old-fashioned windows, while lightning strobes and booming thunder distracted me from my reading. I felt unusually edgy, although I confess I'm always a bit nervous during evening hours, crime being what it is. I don't make my secretary Brenda stay late, so I was alone, on a quiet side street away from the tourist bustle, my imagination conjuring up visions of knife-wielding figures in hockey masks. So maybe I could be forgiven for screaming when the lights suddenly flickered out and the office door banged open against the exposed-brick wall. My heart stopped at the sight of the tall man filling the shadowy doorway. A brilliant stab of lightning briefly illuminated his pale face, a trick of the light making his eyes glow red like a bad flash picture.

"Good evening," came a rich, cultured voice. "I hope I did not startle you."

"Well, you did, a bit, what with the lights going out and then the door blowing open like that." The waver in my voice irritated me. Frowning, I dug in the bottom desk drawer for hurricane candles and lit them with an unsteady hand.

"Most disturbing," the man agreed soothingly as he closed the door. "Is this a bad time? I have come to seek the services of attorney Chris Delahoussaye."

"I'm Chris Delahoussaye."

"A woman?" I heard dismay in his voice. "I assumed..."

"That 'Chris' was a man," I finished, having heard it before. "Does that bother you?"

"I suppose not." He stepped up to the chair across from my desk and settled into the padded leather. "You come highly recommended."

A shiver of fear touched my spine. He wasn't wet at all. "Do you mind telling me which client recommended me?" I asked, forcing a smile. "For my records?"

"Certainly." He leaned forward slightly. The smile died on my lips. His eyes *were* red, hypnotically deep, prom-

ising secrets. Dangerous. I was simultaneously attracted and repulsed.

"Eddie Lobo told me you were an attorney of unparalleled ability," he said. His face was deathly pale, but handsome, with strongly defined features. Although he had no wrinkles, he had the air of an older man, comfortably confident in himself. But the eyes, the eyes you could drown in, held my focus with a gravitational attraction. He was strongly masculine, and I was very much aware of his presence. Disturbed by my physical reaction to the man, I broke eye contact and instantly felt clearheaded.

"Eddie? Oh, yes," I said, shuffling some papers so I wouldn't have to look at him. Eddie's case was another weird one. Lobo had claimed he was struck and injured by a woman's car. She claimed she'd hit a big dog — or a wolf. *His* blood was found on the fender of her car, however, and I won a nice fat jury award for him.

"What brings you here, Mr. —"

"Dracula. Vladimir Dracula."

"*The* Dracula?" I would have laughed, except for those eyes. My mouth went dry. I found myself wishing for a crucifix.

"Please do not be afraid," he said, seeming to sense my thoughts. His toothy smile did nothing to ease my growing terror. My fingers dug painfully into the mahogany arms of my chair. "I will not harm you. A sort of professional courtesy, eh? One bloodsucker to another?" He laughed softly at his own joke, a deep, throaty sound.

I decided not to tell him I considered myself a rung or two above bloodsucker on the lawyer ladder. "Good," I said hoarsely, desperately clinging to my professional persona. "What problem can I help you with, Mr. Dracula?"

"Please, call me Vlad," he said with an aristocratic wave of his hand. "I want to sue the city."

I choked back nervous laughter. "What for?"

"I applied for a job as a computer programmer, only to be told that all functions of the job must be performed during the day. When I explained that working during the day was impossible for me, I was simply rejected. They would not even try to work with me, although I was clearly the best candidate for the job."

"Why do you need a job? Is upkeep on a coffin that expensive?"

"I must also rent a place to keep the coffin," he pointed out. "And then there are the utilities. And these suits." He indicated his black wool tuxedo with silk lapels and a dashing black cape with red satin lining. "They do not come cheap. I have been around so long, I have finally outlived, so to speak, my fortune. I lost most of what was left in the stock market on Black Monday and am reduced to having to hunt for work. Fortunately, in recent times I have developed a great passion for computers. The entire concept is most fascinating."

Dracula, the computer nerd. I again fought the inappropriate urge to laugh.

"You cannot imagine what it is like to live through the centuries as I have," he said. "After a while, everything has the same feel; there is nothing new to lend a spark, a zest to life. Whenever I find something that captures my imagination and challenges my mind, I throw my entire being into it. So I enrolled in night school at the University of New Orleans to study computer programming." He looked almost pitiful. "I studied hard and was one of the top students in my class. I earned my degree with honors, but now I cannot get a job with anyone. The interview with the city was done at the night school, which is the only reason I was able to have it at all, and as I have said, that attempt proved fruitless."

I sensed that some of this speech was designed to arouse my sympathy. No doubt he was a skillful manipulator of people. But, hey, it was working. With the suddenness of the lightning outside, the idea hit me. "It's handicap discrimination," I said, with that excitement I always get at the beginning of a particularly challenging case.

"Handicap?" said Vlad, clearly offended. "I am not crippled, I assure you."

"'Handicap' means more than that," I said quickly. His anger had a way of striking instant terror into the heart. "Any disability that impairs a major life function is considered a handicap under the law. And the law also says that no one can be discriminated against on the basis of his disability."

"So, you are saying that my inability to go out into the daylight —"

"Is a protected disability under the Americans with Disabilities Act."

It was an exciting thought, that we would break new legal ground, but... I hesitated. "I'm not going to lose my immortal soul if I take this case, am I?"

"Damn that Bram Stoker!" Vlad snarled, the raw power of his rage setting my heart thumping. "You have no idea the trouble that vile book has caused me. If I had had a barrister of your skill in those days, I would have sued him for libel."

"So what he said about vampires wasn't true?" I asked hopefully.

"Some of it is true, but he distorted it all. Certainly, vampires drink blood. It is our nature. I did not choose to be this way. But to drink the victims dry, that is just foolishness. Only a very inexperienced vampire would do such a thing. The last thing I need is a lot of other vampires around, all vying for the blood of the living. It would upset the entire ecological balance. I do not kill. I take what I must. But that idiot Stoker got people so worked up that everywhere I go, I have people waving garlic in my face and running after me with wooden stakes. It is most upsetting." Vlad grimaced, and I felt again what I had labelled in my own mind as the "vampire dread".

I chewed on my lower lip as I considered the foolhardiness of accepting this representation.

He looked at me expectantly. "Will you take the case?"

"Okay," I said, shrugging off the wave of foreboding. "First, we file charges with the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission. They'll investigate and say whether they think you've got a claim. It helps if the EEOC finds in your favor, but either way they'll issue what they call a right-to-sue letter and we can file suit in court. I'll get the charges drawn up tomorrow, and you can drop in Thursday to sign them, if you have time."

Vlad smiled wryly. "I am one of the few people who really has all the time in the world."

A few months later I got a letter from Donna Mason, one of my former classmates at Tulane Law School, who now worked for the EEOC in New Orleans.

Dear Chris:

I am enclosing your "right-to-sue letter." The whole gang at the office got a million laughs out of your ADA charge. The vampires of America shall have their rights vindicated! I'm sure it's just what Congress had in mind when it passed the ADA. It's been an age since I've seen you. Call me sometime for lunch.

Donna

I examined the right-to-sue letter. As

I had hoped, she'd put it on official EEOC letterhead. I already had the petition ready to file, so I attached the letter as an exhibit and called a courier to take it to the clerk of court. When the courier brought my copy back, I was pleased to find our case had been assigned to Judge Henry Thibodeaux, the same judge who had presided over the Eddie Lobo case. Judge Thibodeaux was a fair-minded man. Things seemed to be going our way.

A week later, I was sitting at my desk answering interrogatories in a slip-and-fall case when my secretary buzzed me. "Yeah, Brenda?"

"Dawlin', it's that Roy Theriot on the phone," she said.

I sighed. "Oh, well, put him through, I guess." Roy and I had been in perpetual competition with each other since our first semester at Tulane Law School. I hadn't heard from him for almost a year — not since I trounced him soundly in the Eddie Lobo case.

"Chrissy?" Roy was the only person in the world who had the temerity to call me that, but I would never for the world let him know it bugged me.

"Hi, Roy. To what do I owe this pleasure?" My muscles tensed into knots. Adrenaline shot through my veins at the sound of his voice, and I instinctively prepared for combat.

"I'm calling about a case." Roy sounded odd, like he really wanted to say something else. "So, how's business been?"

"Great," I said, surprised at the trivial question. We rarely engaged in friendly small talk. "I have enough to keep me busy, but not so much that I'm drowning in paperwork. And you?"

"Between the contract work for the city and the insurance defense, my plate's about full. How's your family?"

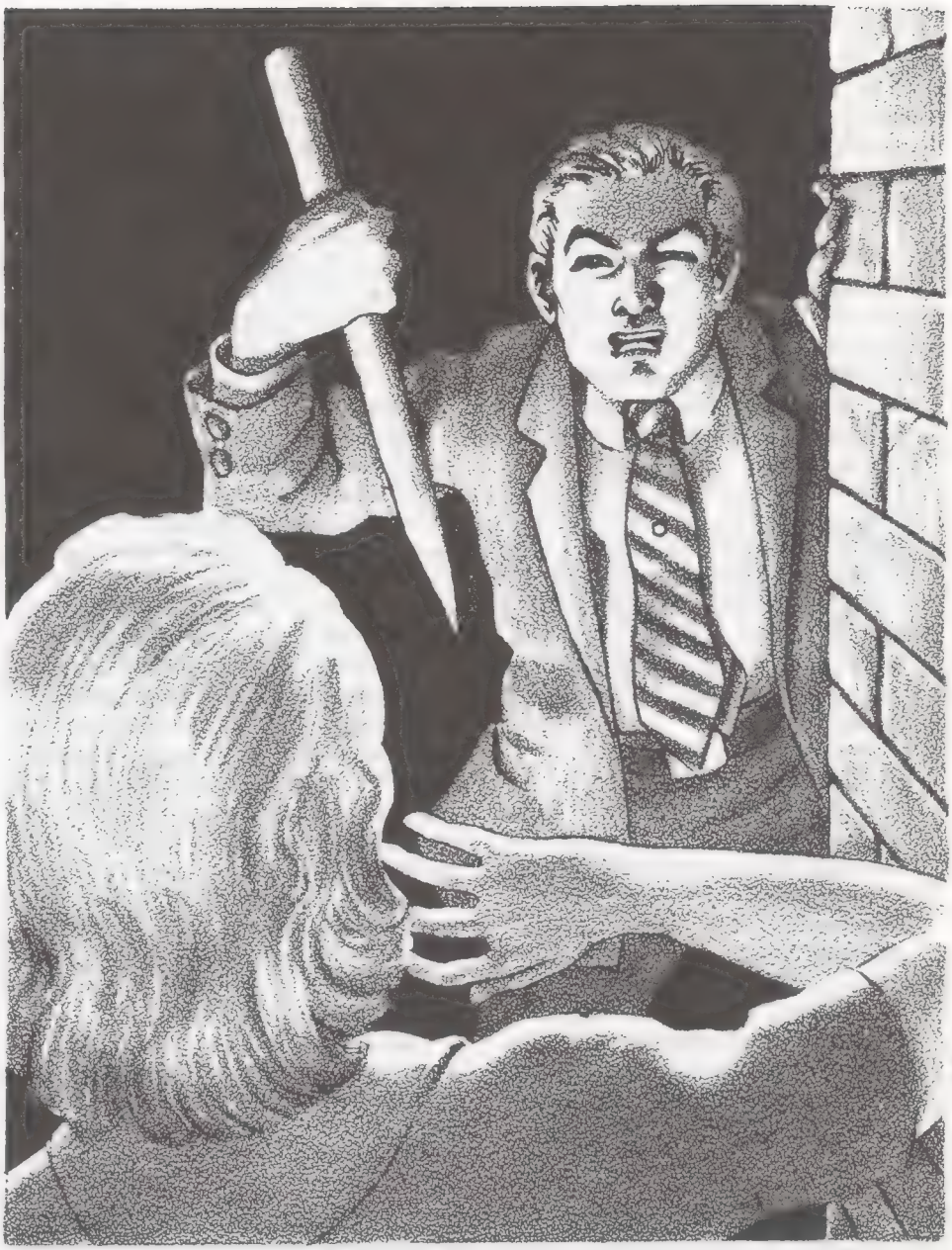
"They're fine," I said impatiently.

"Chrissy, is something wrong?" he asked, the concern in his voice sounding genuine.

"Roy, what the heck are you getting at?"

His sigh carried across the phone lines. "Chrissy, it was one thing for us to joke about werewolves in the Eddie Lobo case. But this — this vampire thing. You could get disbarred if it's a joke, locked up if it's not."

"You got the Dracula case?" I silently cursed my luck, then realized it was probably just as well. Another lawyer might not give me this courtesy call — although I was surprised at the friendly gesture from Roy.



Artwork by George Barr

"Yeah," he said. "I was down at City Hall on another matter when I heard these city workers yucking it up about some smartass attorney who'd filed a discrimination suit for Dracula. When I found out the smartass was you, I asked if I could take the case. What's wid you, gal?" When Roy gets upset the cajun accent he tries so hard to disguise slips through.

"This is a serious case," I said with as much dignity as I could muster under the circumstances. "I'm neither joking nor insane. In fact, I've just filed a summary judgment motion which, I might add, is set for hearing in two weeks."

"But a vampire, Chrissy. Are you really going to tell this fairy tale to a judge?"

"I suggest you meet Vlad before you pass judgment."

"*Vlad*?"

"Why don't you schedule his deposition?" I suggested, ignoring his agitation. "You'll want to take it anyway, and this way you can satisfy yourself that our case is substantial."

"And what if I'm not satisfied?" I felt the threat mingled with concern. The latter surprised me.

"We'll both have to do what we have to do," I said, though with a stirring of unease. I hadn't considered what people would think about the case, except in a vague and abstract way. Things were starting to get a little concrete.

"I suppose we'll have to have the

deposition at night," said Roy sardonically.

"Of course. Is my office okay?"

"Fine," he said, clearly humoring me. "How about next Tuesday at eight o'clock? That way, I can take his deposition before the hearing. Then, if you change your mind you can still withdraw your motion and —"

"Next Tuesday at eight is fine."

It was ten minutes to eight on Tuesday night and I was sitting in my waiting room, appropriately enough, since I was waiting for Vlad, Roy and the court reporter. A knock finally came at the door, but when I opened it, no one was in sight. I stuck my head out to get a better look. Suddenly, a figure jumped out of the alley, brandishing a sharpened stick and yelling, "Boo!"

"Roy, that's not funny," I said crossly, trying to still my pounding heart. "For God's sake, put that stake away before Vlad gets here."

"I thought I'd leave it on the table during the deposition." Roy flashed an evil grin. "Intimidation."

"I suppose a lawyer who lacks the proper skills would have to rely on tricks," I countered, holding the door open for him.

"Ah, Chrissy, you'll never get a husband with a tongue like that," he said, purposely bumping me as he passed.

I fought the temptation to kick him. "Well, you've got it easier than I do. You can just marry your sister like all the other cajuns."

"We don' marry 'em, *cher*," he said, laying on a heavy cajun accent. "We jus' sleep wid 'em."

"If you work harder on your charm, maybe someday someone besides your sister will want to sleep with you."

He raised an eyebrow. "Dat an offer, sugar?"

"In your dreams, Theriot."

"My fondest dreams."

"Behave," I said, coloring.

Much to my relief, Roy slipped the stake into his briefcase and headed upstairs to my conference room. The court reporter arrived next and a few minutes later Vlad entered. I led him up the circular wrought-iron staircase to the conference room, where the court reporter was setting up her transcription equipment and Roy was mutilating a defenseless paper clip. Roy's shocked expression at his first sight of Vlad almost made me laugh. So that's what the vampire dread *looked* like. He drew a deep breath and stood.

"Roy Theriot," he said too brightly, thrusting his hand toward the vampire. Vlad took the proffered hand in his own strong grip. They held on longer than politeness allowed. Roy's stiffened jaw was the only indication he gave of pain.

"Boys," I snapped, feeling like we were back in the schoolyard.

They broke off their "handshake" and settled into their respective chairs, Vlad seated to the left of the court reporter, Roy to the right. I sat on Vlad's free side. The court reporter swore him in.

"State your name for the record," Roy said.

"Count Vladimir Dracula."

The court reporter's hands stilled. The poor thing stared with huge eyes from vampire to attorney and back again. I waved at her to keep typing and she resumed striking keys, although I wasn't sure whether she was recording what was said or simply typing gibberish. One thing I knew was the woman would never accept another assignment from me.

"What's your current profession?" Roy continued.

"I am trained to be a computer programmer, but I have not yet been employed as such."

"And prior to training as a computer programmer, what did you do?"

"I was...inherently wealthy."

"Mr. Dracula, in your pleadings you claim to be a vampire, is that correct?"

"I do not claim, sir, I am."

Sensing Vlad's agitation, I patted his arm under the table. My gesture did not escape Roy's watchful eye, and a frown of disapproval crossed his face. I gave him an innocent smile, hoping to irritate him enough to throw off his train of thought.

"Just how did you become a vampire?" asked Roy, apparently unaffected.

"I was bitten and drained by another vampire — a bloodsucking lawyer like yourself."

Roy's jaw tightened. "And just when did this alleged event occur?"

"By the Gregorian calendar, it would be the year 732 A.D."

The court reporter's hands stopped again, but a warning glance from me got her going again.

"So, you claim to be about 1260 years old?"

Vlad' s eyes glowed ominously at the question. I wanted to tell Roy that it was unwise to bait a vampire, but we were on the record. "That is correct," he said finally.

"Do you drink the blood of human beings, Mr. Dracula?"

"Yes," he said through clenched teeth.

"And do people give their blood willingly?"

Vlad smiled nastily. "Sometimes."

"How many people would you say you've killed in the last 1260 years?" Roy continued.

"Up to now, only two," Vlad said, with a meaningful glare.

"Come on, now," drawled Roy. "You expect us to believe that in all the 1260 or so years you've allegedly been a vampire, you've only knocked off two people? What's the matter? Tooth decay?"

I was about to object to his treatment of my witness when Vlad made an angry hissing noise and pushed himself decisively to his feet.

"Vlad, sit down," I warned.

"I will not be mocked by this insignificant puppy. If he needs proof that I am a vampire, I shall be happy to give it to him."

"Sit down."

Ignoring me, Vlad took a step towards Roy. The court reporter shrank against the table to avoid his touch. Vlad captured Roy's gaze and held it firmly as he continued to advance. He bared his unnaturally long incisors. I saw terror strike Roy, felt it in my own soul.

"Vlad, no!" I yelled. "This isn't going to help you."

He turned the fearsome stare and fangs my way and my next words died in my throat. Was he out of control? Would he kill us all?

Movement caught my eye. Free of the vampire's hypnotic gaze, Roy had reached for his briefcase and was groping for something. His hand came up with the stake.

"Look out!" I shouted. Vlad turned to see Roy raising the stake, preparing to strike. My anger at both of them suddenly overtook my terror. "Vlad, go down to the waiting room right now! I'll be down in a minute. Roy, put that thing away!"

"He's evil, Chrissy," said Roy, his eyes glassy and his voice devoid of inflection. "Someone has to —"

"Roy Theriot, you most certainly are not going to drive a stake through my client's heart," I said. "Put it down. Vlad, I *said* go to the waiting room!" I

was furious with both of them, Vlad for going after Roy, and Roy for bringing out that damned stake. My anger must have gotten through, for they both obeyed me meekly. When Vlad was gone, Roy sank feebly back into his chair.

"Roy, this deposition is over," I said hotly. "If you don't like it, you can explain to Judge Thibodeaux why you were threatening to drive a piece of wood through my client and see if you get any sympathy." I was ignoring the fact that he just might have felt threatened by my client. Anger had put me back in control of the situation, and I was sticking with it.

I headed for the door. "You two stay up here until I send Vlad on his way." I got no argument.

When I got downstairs, Vlad was pacing the floor. "What the hell was that up there?" I demanded. "Are you going to do this in court? Because unless you promise me you won't, I'm off this case."

He saw I was serious. "I promise to control my temper. Eddie told me Theriot was a — how did he put it — 'seven times son-of-a-bitch'. Now I know what he meant."

"Yeah, he and Eddie went round and round at trial. Roy got him so mad he started to turn right there on the stand. Thank God the judge called a recess." I shook my head at the memory. It had been a close call. "Well, you'd better get along home. I'll call you later in the week about the preparations for the hearing."

"Until then," Vlad said with a courtly bow.

I returned to the conference room to find Roy alone. "What happened to the court reporter?"

"She climbed out the window and went down the fire escape. She even left her equipment."

I couldn't resist a grin. "Poor thing. I'll send her stuff over to her office tomorrow." I looked more closely at Roy, then. His face was whiter than Vlad's.

"You want a drink?" I asked hesitantly.

He nodded, childlike. I pulled two Miller Lites from a small refrigerator and popped them open with a reassuring "fssst". Roy stared blankly at the can I held out, as though he'd never seen one before. His whole center of reality seemed shaken as he sat stiffly, staring at the mahogany tabletop. Roy's concept of the world evidently had no place for vampires.

"Roy, are you all right?"

"Yah, sugar, I'm fine," he said absently, not even trying to control his accent.

I pressed the cold, sweating can into his hand. "Drink this. You'll feel better."

Roy took a gulp and expelled a huge breath. "Chrissy, dis is bad. Dis is wrong. *Cher*, you can't keep representing dat— dat thing." His eyes, so dark they were almost black, regarded me seriously.

"Vlad is not a thing."

"No, Chrissy, he's a killer, an evil creature of the devil!" Beneath the big-city veneer he'd managed to cultivate, Roy's rural Louisiana roots were showing.

"I knew you were a lot of things, but I never took you for a superstitious bigot. Vlad's had plenty of chances to harm me if he was going to. As you can see, I'm fine. He only tried to scare *you* because you insulted him. I suggest you forget all the horror comics you've read and see him as a person entitled to happiness, just like you and me." I turned away from Roy and drank deeply from my beer. I was still afraid of Vlad myself, but I understood a little about what it was like to be alone, searching for something to fill the empty spaces of your life. My heart suddenly filled with such an aching longing that I thought it would burst.

I heard the scrape of Roy's chair on the hardwood floor, then jumped slightly as his hands gently gripped my upper arms. His body brushed my back and the moist warmth of his breath on my neck sent a shiver through me.

"Chrissy, I know we fight a lot and make out like we don' like each other, but damn it, girl, I care about you," Roy said softly. "I jus' don' wanna see you hurt — or worse."

I turned to face him and was surprised by the genuine fear in his dark eyes, fear for me. Suddenly realizing how close we were, I started to back away, but his hands tightened their grip.

This is stupid, I told myself as we stood there, breathing unevenly and hovering on the brink of something exciting, disastrous.

"Chrissy?" Roy whispered uncertainly.

I held my breath as he slowly lowered his mouth to mine. The gentle contact sent fire through my veins. I should have slapped him. I kissed him back. His hands slid around to the middle of my back, pulling me closer to the comforting warmth of his body. It felt so *right* and so...*unethical*.

Reality washed over me like cold water, and I panicked. I had to do something before I declared undying love for him. Turning to anger once again as my savior, I pushed violently away from him. "Roy Theriot, you are just about the sneakiest, most devious, unscrupulous —" Words failed me as I feigned outrage.

Confusion filled his eyes.

"You think I'm not onto your game?" I demanded. "Pretending to get all doe-eyed over me, hoping I'll drop the suit. You'll stoop to anything to win a case, won't you?"

"Sugar, I wasn't —"

"I'm on to you, *cher*," I said, my anger in some ways genuine. We were in the middle of a case, for God's sake. Why, after all these years, did he have to pick now to admit he had feelings for me? "I'm not going to fall for your cheap tricks. I'll see you in court. Now get out!"

He opened his mouth as though to try again to convince me, then shut it in a hard angry line and stomped out of the room.

As I heard him clumping down the iron stairs, I couldn't stop grinning. At last, I could admit something I had carefully hidden from myself for years. I was in love with the stubborn, irritating, conceited cajun. There. I'd said it. If I hadn't completely alienated Roy, maybe I'd admit it to him someday — after I trounced him in court, of course.

When the hearing day arrived, I came prepared (hopefully) for every contingency. What I didn't expect was a frontal assault from Judge Thibodeaux. He no sooner took the bench when he said, "Ms. Delahoussaye, while this is all very amusing, I'm not being paid by the taxpayers of this state to be entertained by outlandish lawsuits. You have exactly one minute to show cause why you should not be held in contempt of court and recommended for disbarment."

I eyed him levelly, no easy trick the way my knees were trembling. A judge's ire is a terrible thing to have directed at yourself, no matter how long you've practiced law. "Your honor, I take it you don't believe the allegations in our pleadings nor the

affidavit of my client." I heard Roy stifle a snicker. An involuntary glance his way showed me his smug grin. *He* clearly had been expecting this.

I resolutely continued, "That being true, perhaps your honor would care to hear testimony from Mr. Dracula and judge his credibility for yourself."

Roy popped to his feet to make an objection.

"I'm not holding this court open until after sunset, if that's what you're about to ask," said Judge Thibodeaux, waving Roy back down.

"No, sir, your honor," I said. "While it's true that Mr. Dracula can't walk about in daylight, this courtroom has no windows. He should be safe here, though he'll be a little weak. Would your honor allow me to put on live testimony?"

Roy jumped to his feet again, his face showing alarm. "Your honor, I object. I wasn't given notice that the plaintiff intended to produce live testimony at the hearing."

It was a pretty flimsy objection. I could tell Roy would say just about anything to keep the vampire in the box and out of the courtroom.

"Your honor, Mr. Theriot has already deposed this witness." I was kind enough not to mention that the deposition ended with Mr. Theriot threatening to drive a stick through the plaintiff's heart.

"In that case, I see no prejudice," said Judge Thibodeaux. "Given what's at risk, I'll humor you, Ms. Delahoussaye. But I'm only doing this because the way our courts work, I'd probably get reversed on appeal if I didn't give you a chance to make a defense on the contempt issue. You'd better make it quick, though, because I don't plan to waste much time on this nonsense."

"Yes, sir." I nodded to Brenda, who went to the double doors leading out into the hall. Holding one open, she said, "Wheel him in, dawlin'."

"Ms. Delahoussaye, what in heaven's name..." The judge's voice trailed off as Eddie Lobo carefully wheeled the dolly into the room, up the aisle and through the swinging gate that divided the spectators' seats from the counsel tables. Eddie deposited the shiny wooden casket on the floor next to me and leaned it back against the rail. He smiled and waved at Judge Thibodeaux. I felt a wave of pity for the judge as his face showed the shock of recognition, followed by a "Why me, Lord?" roll of the eyes.

"Thanks, Eddie," I said, as though he'd merely carried in my exhibits or charts. "Can you help me with this lid?"

Eddie muscled open the coffin. Vlad opened his disturbing eyes and rubbed them sleepily. "We're in court," I told him softly. "You're going to have to testify." He nodded.

"Ms. Delahoussaye!" The judge's voice thundered through the courtroom. The hair on the back of my neck stood up, and I straightened with a jerk. "If you're quite through with this charade..." Judge Thibodeaux's voice broke again as Eddie helped Vlad from the coffin and the judge got his first look into those red eyes. I saw the vampire dread descend on him, but to his credit, he never lost his cool.

Vlad gave the judge his most engaging smile, not realizing the effect it had on us mere mortals.

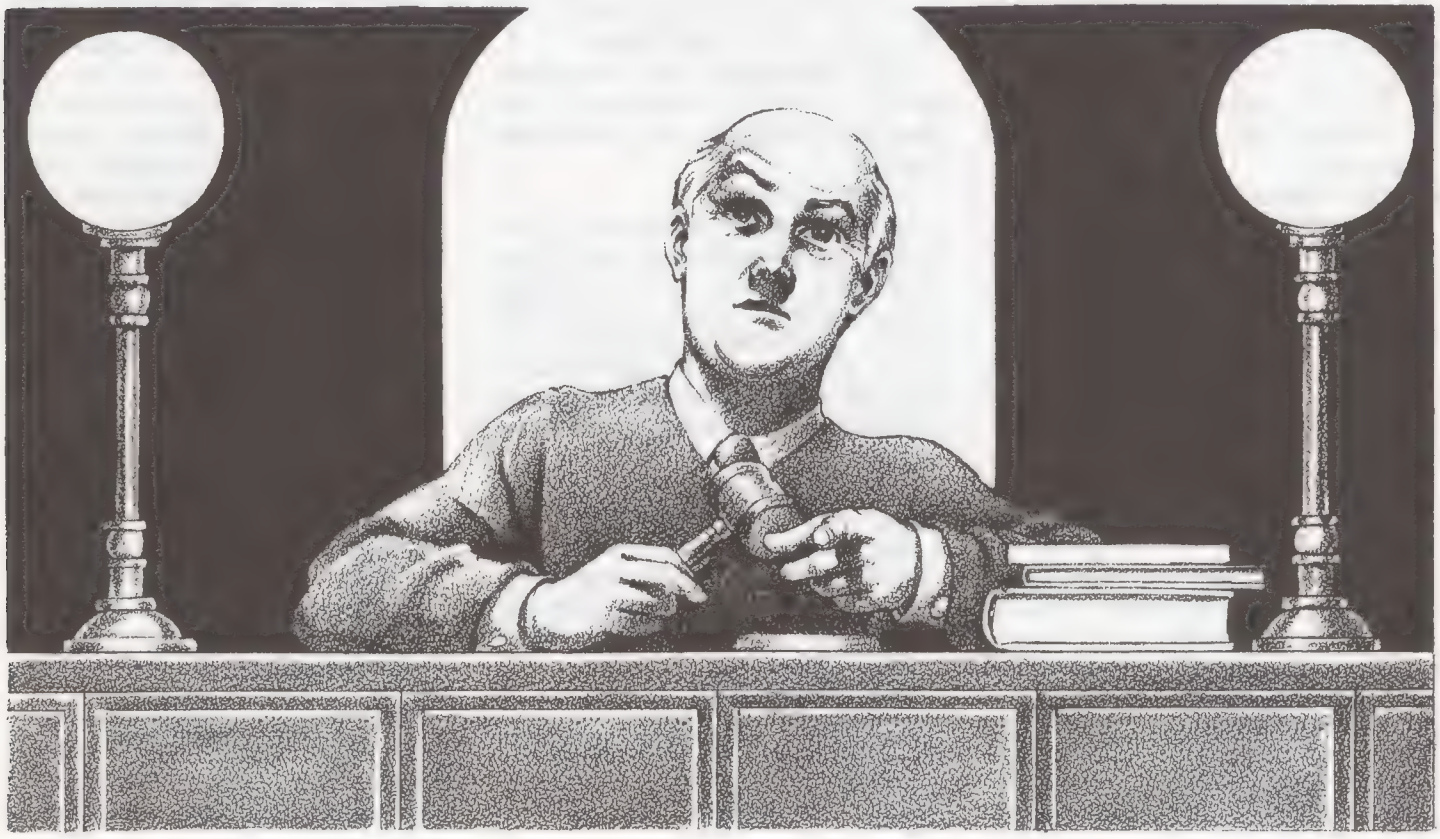
"Mr. — er — Dracula, take the stand," said the judge, subdued.

Vlad was sworn in. It was time to make our case or break my career. Remembering Judge Thibodeaux's warning, I quickly moved through the preliminary information and got to the point. "Mr. Dracula, are you a vampire?"

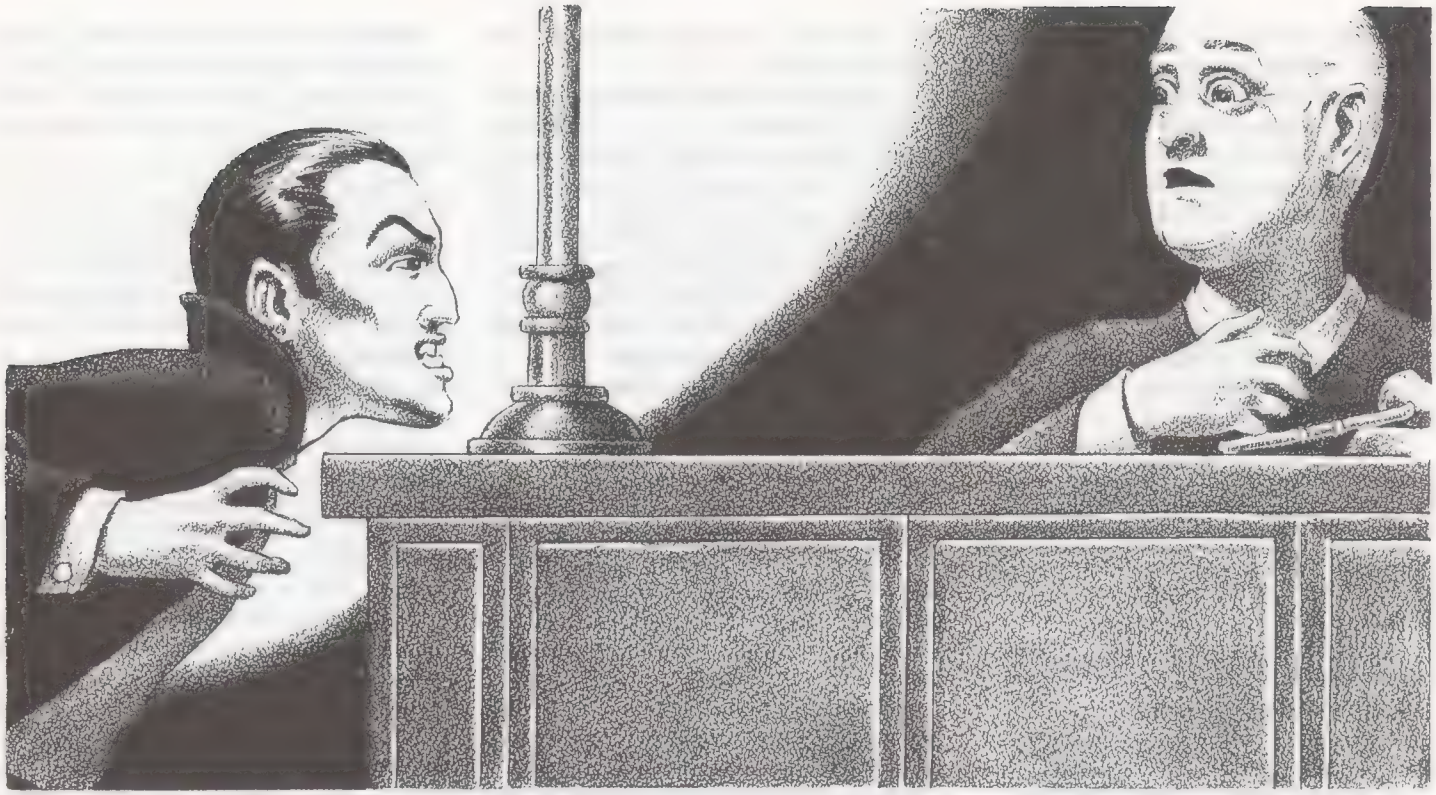
"Yes."

"Please explain vampirism for the record."

"A person becomes a vampire when he is bitten by another vampire and drained of all his blood," Vlad said.



Artwork by George Barr



Artwork by George Barr

"After that, the vampire has virtual immortality as long as he spends part of the day in his native soil and does not venture out into daylight."

"Does the inability to go about by daylight impair any major life functions?" I asked.

"Certainly. I have difficulty finding worthwhile employment in any challenging field. Also, it is hard to find a good dry cleaner."

I frowned. Humor is wasted in the courtroom.

"Mr. Dracula, this is not a place for levity," said Judge Thibodeaux. "If you don't have any injury more grievous than the inability to get your suits cleaned, I have no choice but to rule against —"

"I can never again feel the warmth of sunlight on my face. I see the world only in shades of black, white and yellowed gray. To be unable to have family, friend or lover for fear that my own weakness will cause me to destroy that which I love. To live throughout the ages feared, shunned and hunted. Immortality but no one to share it with. Is this not impairment?"

Judge Thibodeaux tore his gaze from Vlad and turned a severe eye on me. "Ms. Delahoussaye, I now have no doubt your client believes he's a vampire, but wouldn't the best assistance have been to locate his family or notify the authorities so he could have the proper care? By encouraging this fantasy —"

"Fantasy!" thundered Vlad, his red eyes sparking as he half–rose from his seat.

"Mr. Dracula, lower your voice and sit down," said the judge mildly.

"Look at me!" Vlad ordered.

Judge Thibodeaux was so surprised, he obeyed. And met those eyes. I saw the judge falling in, falling under their spell.

"Vlad!" I shouted.

Ignoring me, he murmured to the judge, "Look and see over twelve hundred years of unbearable loneliness, uncontrollable hunger, unspeakable terror, self-loathing, emptiness, despair, searching for an answer as to why the Almighty would permit such an existence, yet lacking the courage to end it."

Judge Thibodeaux's jaw had gone slack, his face void of expression.

Roy was suddenly beside me. "Chrissy, we have to do something. You're the only one who has any control over him."

Do I? I wondered.

The judge moved slowly to the rail that separated the judge's bench from the witness box. He was drawn downward until his face was very close to Vlad's. The vampire's red lips drew back, and his head began to move slowly toward Judge Thibodeaux's neck, as though Vlad, too, were hypnotized.

Roy started to run toward the two of them, but I was faster. This was my job, my fault. I hit Vlad's shoulder full force, turning him from the judge. He grabbed me with lightning-quick reflexes, his eyes mad with hunger. A hurtling object sent me sprawling to the floor, the pain of impact momentarily stunning me. I slowly pushed myself to a sitting position. Roy lay beside me, and Vlad stood menacingly over him, ready to pounce.

"No!" I cried. The desperation in my voice must have reached him. Vlad turned toward me, the madness fading. He gazed through my eyes into my soul, and before I could break it off, he saw more than I wanted him to. A blush spread upward from my neck as I scrambled up from the floor. Roy got up more slowly, still wary.

Judge Thibodeaux shook his head as though to clear it. He must have still been in the trance during the action; he would have been infuriated by a brawl in his courtroom. He drew a deep breath.

"Mr. Theriot, I'm granting summary judgment to plaintiff on the issue of whether he's a vampire. That being so, I must also rule in favor of plaintiff on

the issue of disability. This court will take — ah — judicial notice that — ah — vampires cannot go about by day like ordinary people. I find this to be a disability that impairs a major life function under the Americans with Disabilities Act." Judge Thibodeaux's voice grew calmer and firmer now that he was on a roll. "As to the issue of qualification, I find that plaintiff's academic records show a clear ability to perform all essential functions of the position. The city doesn't even pretend that it tried to accommodate his disability, nor has the city produced proof that accommodation would create an undue hardship. Therefore, I rule that the city must offer employment to plaintiff for the position of Computer Programmer I, but that his hours shall be from 9 P.M. to 5 A.M."

"But your honor," Roy protested. "What about the safety of the night staff — the janitors and watchmen?"

"Mr. Dracula will agree not to satisfy any of his— ah— appetites while on the worksite. Mr. Dracula, you would sign an agreement to that effect, with the understanding that any violation of that agreement would subject you to immediate termination and place you in contempt of this court?"

"Certainly," said Vlad, with the air of an aristocrat granting a boon.

"What about back pay, your honor?" I asked.

"Don't press your luck, Ms. Delahoussaye," snapped the judge. "I find back pay inappropriate under the unusual circumstance of this case. *Anything else, Mr. Theriot?*"

Roy's mouth had opened as though to voice further protests, but it snapped shut under Judge Thibodeaux's glaring scrutiny. "No, your honor," he muttered.

"Very well, then. I order that judgment be entered in favor of the plaintiff under the terms agreed to, each party to bear his own costs. I also order that the record be sealed, to be opened only on my order. I'm coming up for reelection this year, and the last thing any of us needs is this type of publicity. Court is adjourned." Judge Thibodeaux tapped his gavel and pushed himself to his feet.

"Thank you, your honor," I said.

Vlad echoed my comment, then turned to shake my hand. "I cannot thank you enough, Chris."

I felt that happy glow that always comes to me when I know I've truly helped my client. "It's my pleasure." The awkwardness of parting fell between us. "Good luck at your new job."

"I wish you luck in finding what you want, too," he said, paternally.

I blushed. Fortunately, Eddie and Brenda came up then to congratulate us and to help Vlad get settled back into his coffin.

"Ms. Delahoussaye." I turned to see Judge Thibodeaux standing by the door to his chambers. He looked very tired.

"Yes, your honor?"

"I trust you won't take offense when I say I hope never to see another case of yours on my docket."

I grinned. "No offense taken, your honor. But personally, I'd hate to see it happen. I always find justice in your courtroom."

The judge shook his head and retreated to his chambers.

After the lid was securely on the casket, Roy sauntered over to me. No congratulations from him, but then what did I expect? "So, Chrissy, who's your next client going to be? Frankenstein or the Mummy? Maybe you should get some new business cards. I can see it now: 'Chris Delahoussaye — Attorney to the Undead.'"

"Sour grapes?"

Roy laughed. "Maybe. But I'll get you next time."

"In your dreams, Theriot," I said as we walked out of the courtroom, Eddie following with Vlad in tow.

The encounter with Roy dampened the joy of my victory. I saw nothing of the Roy who had kissed me in my office. We were simply back to normal.

I helped Eddie get Vlad loaded into the U-Haul, then trudged wearily towards my little red Miata. It had been a helluva day.

"Chrissy!"

Roy was picking his way through the parked cars, heading in my direction. I almost ignored him, but curiosity got the better of me. "You forget something?" I asked, as he reached my side.

"Not really." He gave me an appealing smile. My heart fluttered involuntarily. "I wanted to wait until we were alone so I could ask you out to a victory dinner. I didn't feel right doing it in front of your clients."

"That's downright civil of you, Mr. Theriot," I said, cautiously melting a bit. "But why this time? You didn't offer to take me out after the Lobo case."

"Now, Chrissy, that was just my bruised ego. You have no idea what it feels like getting your ass kicked to the tune of $500,000 by the woman you love," he said, as though he'd said it to me a thousand times before.

I raised a skeptical eyebrow. "Love?"

"Oh, sugar, I fell in love wid you the firs' time I laid eyes on your pretty face in the registration line that firs' day of law school," he claimed in his most charming cajun accent.

I felt a momentary glow of pleasure, then exasperation. "Why didn't you ever tell me?"

"Well, *cher*, I was afraid to go out wid a gal who's almost as smart as I am," Roy said with a crooked grin. He offered me his arm.

"What do you mean, *almost* as smart?" I laid my hand on his forearm as he led me to his car. "My GPA was higher than yours, if you'll recall."

"That's only because being editor-in-chief of the law review took up so much of my time."

"Then you shouldn't have fixed the election."

Roy clutched his heart. "I'm wounded. How could you think such a terrible thing?" he asked. "Who ratted on me, anyway?"

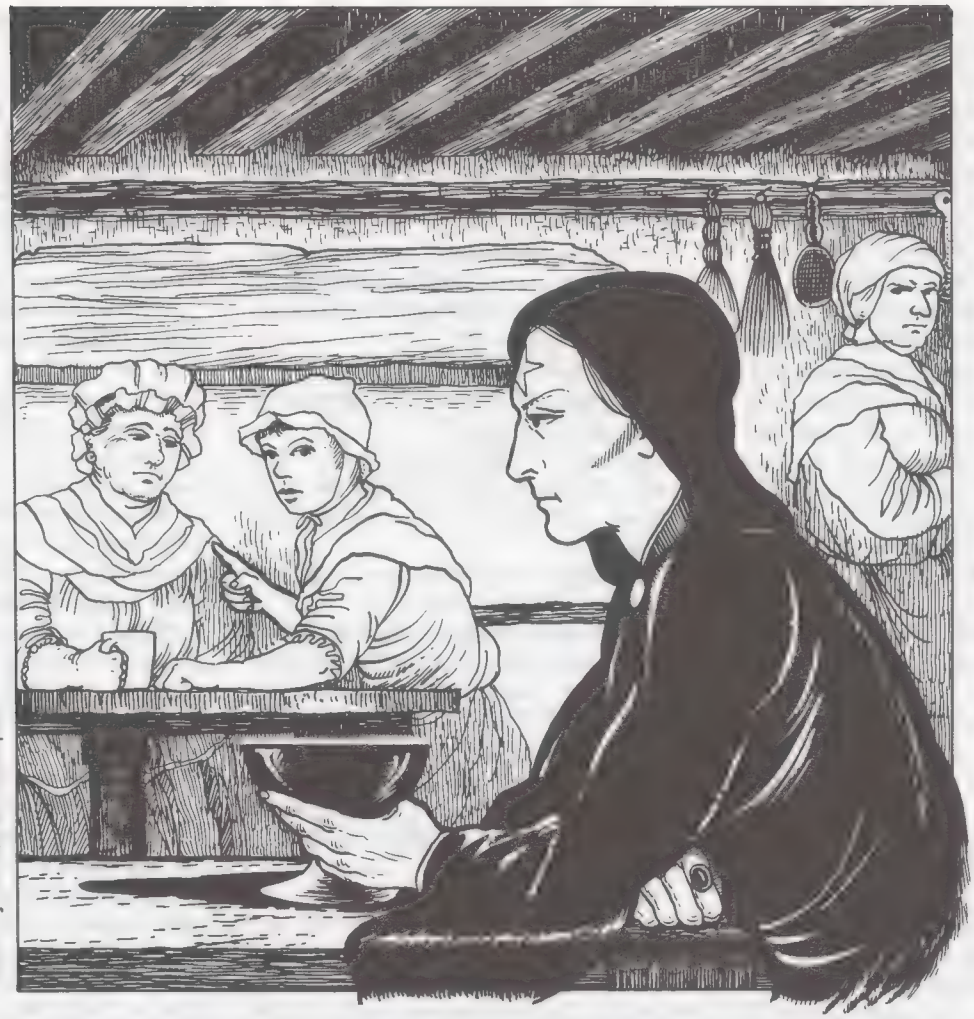
I smiled to myself as we got in his car and headed out of the parking lot. After all the years of hiding our feelings behind school and work, it took a vampire to finally bring us together. I guess sometimes weird is good.

If you drive by New Orleans City Hall at night (you wouldn't want to *walk* by it at night), you may see a lone light burning in an office window. Don't wreck your car from the shock. It's not some elected official burning the midnight oil. It's just a hardworking vampire, earning the rent money just like the rest of us working stiffs (no pun intended).

❄

Julia S. Mandala is a part-time labor attorney in Dallas. The idea for this story came to her when she was wondering how a fantasy writer/lawyer could "write about what you know". When not writing or suppressing the poor, downtrodden workers of America, she enjoys reading, travel and scuba diving with her wonderful husband, Larry. This is her second sale to this magazine.

George Barr has been a professional artist since 1960. He has received a Hugo as Best Fan Artist and was this year's Artist Guest of Honor at Worldcon.



Artwork by Hannah M.G. Shapero

Fools' Fire

by Marion Zimmer Bradley

"If I owned Hell and Texas, I'd rent out Texas and live in Hell."

(Source unknown, but he was a wise man.)

Lythande saw in the distance the lights of a village. As she came closer she focussed on one in particular, the lantern in the window of an inn.

The magician shifted the heavy pack slung over her mage-robe, and prepared to enter the inn to find out whether anyone in that village had need of the services of a magician. The life of a mercenary who was also a magician was hardly an easy one. Magic, as Lythande was fond of saying, while truly a fine art and of great aesthetic value, in itself put no beans on the table. And no Adept of Lythande's rank would practice her art for crass cash alone. Lythande was an Adept of the Blue Star, and such magicians could not stoop to the arts of the hedge-wizard or herb-wife. But at least those were assured of a living, while the Adept, who could not stoop to sell her magical arts, must often rely on her minstrel's skills for her supper.

She went into the inn and took a seat, intending to begin by listening to the gossip. A frowsy waitress shambled toward her, and Lythande asked her for a bowl of wine. Not to drink — for the vows under which such Adepts lived forbade that she might ever be seen to eat or drink in the sight of any man. But at such an inn, at the center of village affairs, she could, for the price of a bowl of wine, sit as long as she wished, listen to all the gossip and perhaps hear if anyone in the village had need of such services as hers. Once she had been brought so low that she had had to accept a commission to rid a town of an infestation of wuzzles. Although the creatures were magical, they were so much like rats that Lythande had felt herself not much better than an exterminator.

For a time, Lythande was so cold that she only sat and warmed herself, pay-

ing little attention to the talk that ebbed and flowed around her. But as her body thawed, a conversation between two of the villagers worked its way into her consciousness. They spoke of a strange fire that had appeared at some distance in the woods.

"It's just burnin' away out there and no one can come near it. Every time I see it, it looks like it'll set the woods afire."

"My old man followed it for hours last week and ne'er came nary closer," another said. "If he wasn't such a good woodsman he'd a been lost an' ne'er found his way back a'tall."

Lythande pricked up her ears. This sounded as if some form of malevolent magic might be at work. And she knew from experience that where there was magic, there might be work for a mercenary magician — and where there was work there was pay. Perhaps the pockets of her mage-robe, now all but empty of coin, would soon be filled. Even the greatest of Adepts must eat, she thought, and surely something had led her here.

She said to the woman who feared for her husband, "Tell me, is this a magical fire?"

The woman looked at Lythande suspiciously at first, but the attraction of a new audience was overpowering. "It looks to be," she said, "an I wish it 'ud stop."

"Maybe no harm's bein' done just now," chimed in the first woman, "but how do we know it's not the gates of Hell?"

"And here to carry some of us down to Hell with it?" suggested another.

"It may be nothing but a harmless will-o-the wisp," Lythande said diffidently, though she knew she might talk herself out of a job. "Have you any evidence that it means ill to anyone?"

"No, an' I don't need no evidence," a man broke in. "I don't hold with no magic. We don't want no magic around this here place!"

"I truly advise you to let it alone," said Lythande "Most magic means no harm, and if you let it be it will do the same for you. But if you go seeking it, it may waken to your existence, and then it will be as if you had poked your fingers into a hornet's nest."

"But suppose 'tis really the gates of Hell?" asked one of the women. "How can we live knowin' *that's* right at our feet?"

"I cannot see how the gates of Hell right at your feet would make any difference, provided you do not go exploring them — nor let your children go poking sticks through the doors to see them burn," Lythande observed.

The woman bridled. "Seems to me, magician, it's everybody's duty to resist Hell any way we can. Anyway, that's what the Good Books say."

Lythande said smoothly, "I am not familiar with your Good Books, but I will grant that if Hell is a place of evil — of which I am not convinced — then it is a worthy duty to resist it."

"But you'll allow as there's Good and Evil," one asked belligerently.

"I do."

"Then you've got to believe in the Good Books."

Lythande considered a moment. "Is it permitted to ask why?"

"There's no other way to be righteous. It's written in the Good Books that no man is righteous of himself but only by the wisdom that is written in the Good Books." His voice had taken on the tone of recitation.

"Then we are to believe what is written in your Good Books because the Good Books say so? The logic fails somewhere." Lythande was coming to the opinion that if these people had no better occupation than this, then Hell was welcome to them. She wanted to rise and depart forthwith, shake the dust of the place off her boots and never enter it again. It hardly seemed likely that the inhabitants would thank her — or pay her — for dealing with their problem magically. But her oath did not recognize such considerations. Good Books or no — it required her to fight evil wherever she might encounter it, from now till the Last Day. Sighing, she bent again to her task.

"Why do you think it the gates of Hell?"

"It burns like no natural fire, and gives off the stink of brimstone," said one of the men. "The Good Books don't mention nothin' else like that. What else could it be?"

"Alas," said Lythande, "I can suggest nothing without seeing it. And I hesitate to condemn anything without first doing so. Nor have any of you seen it clearly, if I understand you correctly. So I ask again: how can you be sure it is the gates of Hell?"

That silenced them for a moment. Then one woman said, "Well, I ain't goin' near it. I've tried to live a righteous life and I ain't throwin' it away by chasin' after Hell!"

The muttered response of the crowd agreed that — given that the strange fire most likely *was* of Hellish origin — no one was particularly eager to make a personal confirmation.

One of the men stepped towards Lythande and said challengingly, "I don't suppose you'd be willing to take a look, seein' as you're not afraid of Hell."

She sat silently for a moment as if considering the idea. It seemed there might be a paying job here after all. "*Someone* should look at it, and try to determine what it is before deciding what to do about it," she said temperately.

"Would you be willin' to look at our curse?"

"I would," Lythande said. "I am curious to see this marvel — I would not at this point call it a curse."

"So what would you call it?" a woman in the crowd asked.

"I would call it mischance," Lythande said. "I think it a capital mistake to take anything in this universe as personally aimed at us. Whatever happens is probably no more than the gears of the universe grinding. So usually I mind my own business and do not seek to interfere."

"But it's up to us to right wrongs," a woman protested.

"I do not feel myself called to right all the wrongs of the world," Lythande said. "Surely some of them are none of my business." All too many of them, she thought, seemed to end up her business.

"I'd call that immoral," the woman said. "My old ma told me always that it was everybody's business to right any wrong she saw. Right's right, and wrong's wrong, no matter where you find 'em."

What a dreadful philosophy, Lythande thought. *That would make everybody a busybody*. But did not say it aloud; she still had hopes of finding work in this village and thought it better not to make too clear to these rigid people how different their notions of morality were. She simply murmured, "Certainly that is a philosophy many people hold," and left it at that.

One of the men seated by the fire asked, "So you'd be willin' to go out into the waste an' see if that there fire is really the gates of Hell?"

"I would — for a suitable fee," said

Lythande. "But," she warned, "if it is really the gates of Hell, even with my magic I cannot promise to close them."

"We don't want nor need magic for that," said the man grimly. "If so be it's Hell, we can deal with it ourselves, like it says in the Good Book, with fastin's an' prayer."

Lythande fought the temptation to smile. *Will it then fall to me to protect the gates of Hell from an army of enraged villagers?* But aloud she only murmured "That must be a great comfort to the mothers of your children."

He looked at her sharply and said, "If you're goin' to go look at it, then don't just sit there."

Outside the inn, she was pointed in the direction of the woods. She saw at once what the villagers had meant, and wondered that she hadn't seen or sensed it on her approach. Far off the reddish glow of a column of fire could be seen, burning away by itself in the waste. At first glance — and maybe even on second or third — it did look rather like the gates of Hell: fierce, red, and glowing away behind the black bars of trees like the grate of a furnace.

As she walked toward it, she realized it was farther away than it looked. It seemed to slip through the trees as she approached, and even at Lythande's long striding walk, it took her the best part of two hours to come near to it. *Now whoever heard,* she thought to herself, *of Hell avoiding those who pursue it? And what will I do if I find it really is the gates of Hell? Why have I been led here anyhow, among these people who think they know the answers for everyone?* It all seemed absurd. Even if she believed in Hell, what would it be doing out here in the wilderness, burning all alone where there were unlikely to be any sinners for it to catch?

And yet the closer she approached, the more her senses — both ordinary and magical — told her that what the villagers feared might be correct. She caught up with the fire at last, examining the sultry glow which beat up as if from the very center of the world. Even as she looked over the edge, she knew it was not literally down under the earth. Here, she thought, among a people who consider themselves to be the most righteous on the face of the land, the gates which were only symbolic for others literally yawned down below. And then, after a long time, she began to understand why it was here, among these narrow people — so sure they knew what was best for everyone — that she should find the gates of Hell.

Artwork by Hannah M.G. Shapero

At last when she had figured out what she must do and say to them — and even perhaps, understood a little of why this task had been laid upon her — she turned about and went back toward the town.

When she left the fire it was chilly again, and she walked briskly to warm herself on the two hour journey back. She found herself again within the inn facing what looked like the same scant half-dozen glum-looking people, seated in the common-room awaiting her return.

"Well," they greeted her. "Did you find anything? Was the fire truly the gates of Hell?"

Lythande drew her face into a solemn expression. "I found it," she said, "and I am sorry to tell you that it is truly the gateway of Hell."

There was a confused outcry — a dozen people all talking at once — the gist of which seemed to be: "What ha' we done to deserve this?" One woman appealed directly to Lythande. "Alas! What evil have we done, that we should have the very gates of Hell at our doors?"

"Nothing," said Lythande. "Can you not see what a great honor it is to be trusted with keeping the very gates of Hell?" Which, of course, was one way of putting it, although not the one Lythande would ordinarily have chosen. But knowing these people it was impossible that anyone would stumble unwitting through those gates. The villagers would subject them to so many theological arguments that people would run away before coming into the slightest danger — and likely never return again.

Lythande pocketed her fee, which was not small, but the village was in so much pride of possession that no one protested. One would think, she mused, that Hell would be a popular attraction.

Well, she considered while going down the steps, maybe, in this town, it would.

❄

MARION ZIMMER BRADLEY is the editor of this magazine.

HANNAH M.G. SHAPERO works as an architectural illustrator as well as her popular SF work.

The Last Word

You hold in your hand what is probably the last issue of this magazine ever to have been prepared by conventional pasteup; future issues will be produced directly from computer disk to photographic negative to the final printed page. I'm skilled (and so is Heather, who's done most of the recent pasteup) with a gadget called a "hand waxer", and with scissors, Exacto knife, white-out, and felt pen. I'm pretty good at getting columns of type to line up by eye. But these skills, honed for years, have become as unnecessary as skill in the use of a button hook, a gizmo I gather my turn-of-the-century aunts needed daily around the house to put on their shoes.

By next issue, we'll probably own a high-resolution optical scanner, and all the line art will be converted into computer files and added to the computer image of the page. If can we find an affordable office scanner that will give us high-quality output, we'll scan our own halftones as well. (Artwork is divided, for purposes of magazine production and printing, into two categories: line art and halftones. Alicia Austin and Rob Alexander. Dameon Willich and Gail Butler. Margaret Organ-Kean and Lori Deitrick. Pen-and-ink drawings, scratchboard, and the like; vs. water colors, oils, acrylics, and photographs. [George Barr, clever devil, uses a line art technique to produce images that look halftoned. Just to keep me on my toes.])

But you're probably more interested in learning about the *stories* in the next few issues. Well, C.J. Cherryh and Jane Fancher are, I understand, hard at work on the next cover story, and C.J.'s brother, artist David Cherry, has started the cover painting. We have a new story from eluki bes shahar that's sort of a sequel to "Haut-Clare". And we have future cover stories by Tanya Huff and by Jo Clayton. So keep watching your mailbox.

Since I've never even applied for a passport, I've decided that it's time to get one: I'm definitely going to the World SF Convention in Glasgow this August. If Marion's health permits, she will be there also. And my assistant, Heather Rose Jones, will be at the Glasgow convention, following her attendance at a session on medieval Welsh literature and paleography in Aberystwyth. I'll take along my fiddle — just don't expect solos; Heather plans to try to borrow a harp — we may work up some duets. Marion and Heather will return to California after the con, but I'll travel around the British Isles for another two weeks, so if there's something I should do, a specialty sf or fantasy bookshop I should visit, or someone I should meet while I'm there, drop me a line at the magazine beforehand. So far I plan to visit the Victoria and Albert Museum in London for its costume exhibits; travel to Bath and Brighton; and see the botanical garden in Edinborough.

Other conventions where Marion and I will travel are Rustycon (January) and NorWesCon (April), both in Seattle. I'll attend Potlatch in Oakland in February, the Nebulas in New York in late April, and go to WesterCon in Portland in July. Raul Reyes will be at Arisia in New England in January (the same weekend Marion and I are at RustyCon). So if you can't make it to Fantasy Worlds Festival, look for us at one of these other conventions and be sure to come up and say hello.

— *Rachel E. Holmen*

When was the last time you rescued a fair maiden?

Have you wondered what life would be like if you could fly? Would you take a griffin home from the pound?

Then you probably want to subscribe to MARION ZIMMER BRADLEY'S *FANTASY Magazine*, where all these things and more can happen.

Subscription rates are $16.00 per year. Canadian subs are $24.00 (payable in U.S. funds); overseas subscriptions are $38.00. All subscriptions, including Canadian, are payable directly in U.S. funds only. Please make checks payable to Marion Zimmer Bradley.

❑ Yes, I'm enclosing payment for the next four issues. Start my new subscription with the current issue.

❑ I don't want to miss any back issues, so here's my order for them as well.
Please send me issues:

❑ 1 ❑ 2 ❑ 3 ❑ 5 ❑ 7 ❑ 8 ❑ 9 ❑ 10
❑ 11 ❑ 14 ❑ 15 ❑ 16 ❑ 17 ❑ 18 ❑ 19 ❑ 20
❑ 21 ❑ 22 ❑ 23 ❑ 24 ❑ 25 ❑ 26

for $4.95 each plus $2.50 per order for postage. (See p. 26 for descriptions of back issues.)

Name: _____

Address: _____

City, State, Zip _____

☐ Check enclosed ☐ Visa/MC information below

#_____ exp.____/____

signature:_____

Marion Zimmer Bradley's *FANTASY* Magazine, Box 249, Berkeley CA 94701

The Cauldron — Issue #26

Story	Artist
❑ **Dinner Music** by Jo Clayton	❑ Nicholas Jainschigg
❑ **The Satyr's Song** by Laura J. Underwood	❑ James Balkovek
❑ **The Mage Who Dreamed of Gryphons** by Cynthia McQuillin	❑ Julia Lacquement
❑ **Brimblestone, Great and Terrible** by Michael Mardis	❑ Steve Campbell
❑ **Kaleidoscope** by Kim Fryer	❑ Michael Kucharski
❑ **Learning Experience** by Phillip Wayne	
❑ **Cream, Cake, and Colored Light** by Carol E. Leever	❑ Gail Butler
❑ **Needles and Threads** by Vicki Martin	❑ Dameon Willich
❑ **The Wizard and the Lizard** by Carl Thelen	❑ Barb Armata
❑ **Dracula's Lawyer** by Julia S. Mandala	❑ George Barr
❑ **Fools' Fire** by Marion Zimmer Bradley	❑ Hannah M.G. Shapero

Only one ballot per reader, please!!!

Vote for your favorite stories and artists, then send the ballot to:

Marion Zimmer Bradley's *FANTASY Magazine*
P.O. Box 249
Berkeley, CA 94701

If you'd rather not tear out this page, a photocopy is fine, or just write your choices LEGIBLY and send us a letter. Mark 1 for first, 2 for second, etc.

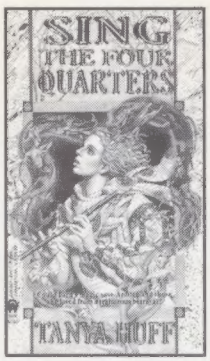
Want a subscription? An order blank is on page 63. A back issue order form is on page 30.

New from DAW Books!

SING THE FOUR QUARTERS
by Tanya Huff

For Princess Annice, who could bring forth the elemental spirits from each of the four quarters, the call of magic was too strong to be denied, even if it meant renouncing her royal blood and becoming a fugitive in her own land.

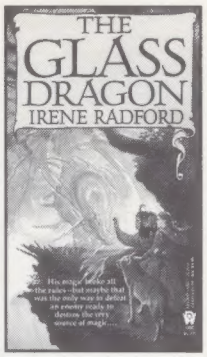
0-88677-628-7 **Fantasy** **$4.99/$5.99 in Canada** **Dec. 1994**



THE GLASS DRAGON
by Irene Radford

Within a realm which has always been protected by its magicians, and in a kingdom whose ruler's own life is intricately linked with that of the dragons, the disappearance of these magical beasts could see the land fall to invaders and all magic forever drained from the world.

0-88677-634-1 **Fantasy** **$4.99/$5.99 in Canada** **Dec. 1994**



THE BLACK GRYPHON
by Mercedes Lackey and Larry Dixon

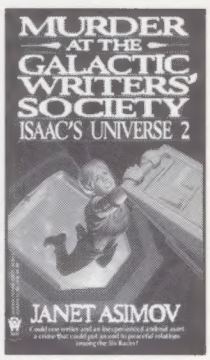
Skandranon Rashkae is everything the sorcerer Urtho intended gryphons to be when he created them as defenders of his realm. Now as the evil mage Ma'ar is once more preparing to advance on Urtho's Keep, Skandranon is sent to spy across enemy lines. But as the days pass with no sign of Skandranon, all in Urtho's camp worry that doom is upon them and that the black gryphon will never return.

0-88677-643-0 **Fantasy** **$5.99/$6.99 in Canada** **Jan. 1995**

MURDER AT THE GALACTIC WRITERS' SOCIETY
by Janet Asimov

For the android known as Arda, the meeting of the Galactic Writers' Society signals the start of a mission to the stars—and beyond—as she follows the trail of an elusive and diabolically clever murderer.

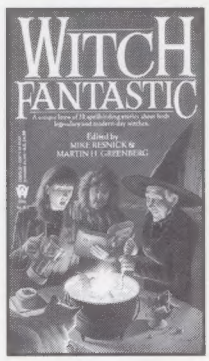
0-88677-644-9 **SF** **$4.99/$5.99 in Canada** **Jan. 1995**



WITCH FANTASTIC
edited by Mike Resnick and Martin H. Greenberg

From a timeless coven gathering on All Hallow's Eve, to a witch and her cat with the power to rewrite history, here are 32 stories both legendary and modern-day, created by some of fantasy's best and brightest.

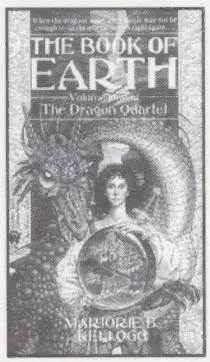
0-88677-640-6 **Fantasy** **$4.99/$5.99 in Canada** **Jan. 1995**



THE BOOK OF EARTH: Volume One of The Dragon Quartet
by Marjorie B. Kellogg

Erde, the only daughter of a powerful lord, senses that something has gone terribly wrong with her world. With her mother and grandmother dead and no one left to protect her from the swiftly spreading madness, Erde flees her father's castle, bent on a quest to find the dragon called Earth and its mage, the only beings who can save their world.

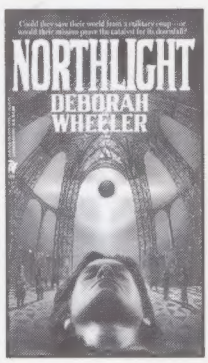
0-88677-574-4 **Fantasy** **$4.99/$5.99 in Canada** **Feb. 1995**



NORTHLIGHT
by Deborah Wheeler

On a world caught up in political turmoil, the disappearance of a border Ranger and the assassination of a beloved elder statesman become the catalysts for a rescue mission that will expose an attempted military coup and open the way to a world from which humans had fled generations ago.

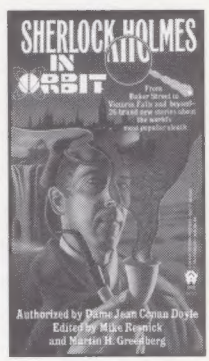
0-88677-639-2 **SF** **$4.99/$5.99 in Canada** **Feb. 1995**



SHERLOCK HOLMES IN ORBIT
edited by Mike Resnick and Martin H. Greenberg

Sherlock Holmes has been a perennial favorite in literature since his very first case. Here now is an authorized edition of 26 all-original stories about the most popular sleuth ever to pit his wits against the most diabolical criminals the world has known.

0-88677-636-8 **SF** **$5.50/$6.50 in Canada** **Feb. 1995**



DAW Books, Inc.

Publishers of Science Fiction, Fantasy, and Horror Since 1971

Distributed by PENGUIN USA

For our complete Catalog listing hundreds of DAW titles in print, please write:
Elsie B. Wollheim, DAW Books, Inc.
375 Hudson Street, New York, NY 10014

Skandranon Rashkae is perhaps the finest specimen of the gryphon race, with gleaming ebony feathers, majestic wingspan, keen magesight, and sharp intelligence. He is everything the human sorcerer Urtho intended to achieve when he created these magical beings to be the defenders of his realm—a verdant plain which has long been coveted by the evil mage Ma'ar.

Now as Ma'ar is once again preparing to advance on Urtho's Keep, this time with a huge force spearheaded by magical constructs of his own, Skandranon is sent to spy across enemy lines.

But as the days pass, with no sign of Skandranon, all in Urtho's camp worry that doom is upon them and that this prince of gryphons will never return...

• Featuring beautiful Jody Lee cover art.

THE BLACK GRYPHON
Mercedes Lackey
& Larry Dixon

DAW FANTASY/first paperback edition:
0-88677-643-0/$5.99 ($6.99 in Canada)

also available in hardcover:
0-88677-577-9/$22.00 ($27.99 in Canada)

DAW Books, Inc.

Publishers of Science Fiction, Fantasy, and Horror Since 1971

Distributed by
PENGUIN USA—MASS MARKET

For our complete Catalog listing hundreds of DAW titles in print, please write:

Elsie B. Wollheim
DAW Books, Inc.
375 Hudson Street
New York, NY 10014

DAW FANTASY